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# **AGRICULTURAL LABOUR CONDITIONS IN NORTHERN INDIA**

**By**

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## PREFATORY NOTE

The present work is an intensive and systematic investigation into the economic conditions of agricultural workers in northern India. In view of the growing importance of studies in agricultural economics, and the variety of problems that face the country at the present, this survey will fill up an important gap in our economic literature. An attempt has been made to make the scope of investigation as comprehensive as possible by collecting data on almost all the aspects of economic and social life of the actual tillers of the soil. This effort made it necessary to work out a plan of studying the subject as a whole rather than in discrete and disconnected topics, and to take into consideration the problems of scope and method which arose during the course of this investigation. The present volume has, therefore, been divided into four parts, each part analysing one important feature of the problem in its details and completeness:

Part I deals with problems of general character, i.e. the classification and recruitment of labour power, numerical strength and variations during the past four decades. Part II deals with the study of various types of Begar and Agrestic Serfs found in different agricultural zones of northern India. Part III deals with the general problems of welfare, such as food consumption, sources of income and the standard of living. Part IV deals with conclusions and recommendations for labour legislation and social reform.

I have confined my studies to a period of about four decades preceding the Global War. This has enabled me, first, to take into consideration the most recent problems confronting the agricultural workers in modern India; and second, to make a comparative study of the trends of agrarian problems in the preceding and succeeding periods of the World War I.

The field of investigation is also limited to the five Provinces of Northern India, viz. the Punjab, the United Provinces, Bihar, Orissa and Bengal, in order to treat the subject on a regional basis and with comparatively greater thoroughness. Relevant facts and illustrations, however, have been taken from borderland Provinces and other parts of the country as well.

I have made first-hand surveys in parts of Chota Nagpur, Bihar and Orissa to study the Kamiauti system of agrestic serfdom, and after a continuous stay of several years amongst slave-workers I have been able to collect reliable data on which my conclusions are based. I have covered hundreds of miles in sun and rain in the remotest submontane regions of Oudh and Bihar to study the conditions under which landless workers earn their scanty bread with the sweat of their brow. I had to live and eat with these workers and was thus successful in winning over the confidence of the ignorant and conservative rural-folk, and in eliciting interesting and valuable information concerning the problems of food and standard of living. In certain parts of Bihar and the United Provinces, where high-caste workers predominate, the custom of observing purdah was a serious obstacle to making enquiries, and many a time I had to do my work at great risk of prestige and under adverse circumstances.

I have throughout consulted standard publications, Government reports of various commissions, monographs published by academic and independent workers, and relevant literature on conditions prevailing in foreign countries. I have also made use of a large selection of periodicals, journals and magazines published by various universities and research institutions. Since the subject under investigation is entirely new in Indian economic literature, I had to rely for the most part on the records of Patwaris, Tahsil Records, Survey and Settlement Reports, and confidential reports of district officers. The Governments of Bihar and the U. P. have been particularly helpful in giving access to confidential records and lending the assistance of village officials. The large number of rural section publications of the Board of Economic Enquiry, Punjab, have been a source of valuable information for that Province only.

I must confess that it has been with the greatest difficulty that I have collected the material for a subject which has not yet drawn the attention either of the State or the academic worker. Most of the material has therefore been collected first hand and verified on the spot from reliable authorities, both private and government, before it was included in this survey. In the light of the enormous data already collected, and with the intimate knowledge of the problems facing the agricultural workers, I have been able to suggest with confidence the remedial measures suiting the peculiar geographical, economic and social conditions of India.

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## CHAPTER I

### CLASSIFICATION OF AGRICULTURAL LABOURERS

The rural population in India may be differentiated into numerous functional groups stratified both socially and economically. Though the rural pyramid is much less stratified than the urban, the fundamental scheme of variation is evident if judged from the standpoints of wealth, income, standard of living, land holdings and subsequent domination and subjection, and also social prestige and political privileges accruing therefrom.

There is a great variation of the types of peasant establishments owing to differences in economic motives and varied formations of the social order in which the peasants of different countries live. Thus we find that there are rather important differences between an Egyptian Fellah and an American Farmer; a German Bordebauer and an Italian Mezzadro; a Russian Moujik and an Indian Kisan; a French Fermier and a Chinese Farmer.

Unlike the western countries where big latifundia and capitalistic estates form a characteristic feature of the rural economy, the large stratum of poor peasants and landless labourers predominates the Indian agrarian system. The ties of solidarity between respective rural aggregates are more lasting in Indian villages, chiefly owing to the division of labour and similarity of members. Since the interests of these aggregates gradually merge one into the other, the antagonism between them is much milder and less intensive than in the West, where history is filled with records of overt explosion of poorest classes against the capitalist landlords in times of political and consequently agrarian unrest.

In northern India the problem of rural stratification is closely connected with that of contemporary tendencies in the degree of survival of various types of agricultural enterprises. There is a manifest tendency towards an increased concentration of land in the hands of capitalistic entrepreneurs and the consequent increase of landless rural proletariat. This has increased the social distance between various aggregates and has caused considerable conflict and social antagonism. The growth of rent-receivers and non-agricultural classes in rural areas, and the decrease of peasant-proprietors



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has greatly infused the spirit of class struggle among the new aggregates of landless field workers and unspecified rural labourers. Above all, the weakening of the institution of caste and a progressive abandonment of hereditary occupations have, to a serious degree, impaired the vitality of rural hierarchies and communal functionaries.

The agricultural population most commonly consists of the rent-receivers, cultivators and field-workers. Each of these classes is further divided into smaller groups, and the differences of these stratas are intensified on the basis of the type of the agricultural enterprise with which they are connected. This economic action to a large extent determines the social position and the privileges of each class, and the entire agricultural population is subjected to a complex process of stratification from which the rural masses can not escape and with which they have to get along.

The term *Agricultural Labour*, on a composite basis of classification, would, therefore, include members from all the above classes who are engaged in the actual cultivation of land. It gives rather a high pyramid of social stratification. At the top are the cultivating-owners of the capitalistic type who perform only skilled work, while the lowest stratum comprises of landless workers who perform unskilled work and receive poor remuneration. Thus the term *agricultural labour* represents the labour of the following classes:—

- (a) Cultivating Owners,
- (b) Tenant Cultivators,
- (c) Landless Farm Labourers,
- (d) Field Workers (Unspecified).

This classification will exclude rent-receivers (non-cultivating owners and tenants), artisans, and general labourers employed in public works and urban industries, but residing in villages. The exclusion of artisan labour deserves special mention because most of their work is indirectly connected with agriculture. Therefore the present definition is limited to actual workers on the field in all or any one of the above capacities.

The cultivating owners have their own land, tools, and cattle and with the help of family hands they cultivate their land. Hired help is also employed. If the holding is too big, it is sublet to landless labourers on produce rents, in which case the cultivating owner becomes a rent-receiver. Cultivating owners are the cultivators of 'Sir' land and 'Khudkasht'.

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Tenant cultivators are either statutory, occupancy, or non-occupancy, and cultivate rented holdings of land belonging to hereditary landlords. They work with their own cattle and tools, and depend on their family hands with casual hired help. This class forms the bulk of the actual tillers of the soil, but excludes those occupancy tenants whose entire holding is sublet in small plots to under-tenants, and who depend on the differential rent obtained by such sub-letting.

The third class of agricultural labourers includes those workers who have no land (owned or rented) and no capital, but hire out their labour to well-to-do tenants and landlords. They return themselves as agriculturists whose principal, and in many cases hereditary occupation, is cultivation of non-cultivating owners' land. Their labour is skilful and is always in demand for such operations as ploughing, sowing, irrigating, marketing, etc. All family hands contribute their share to the family budget, and therefore, most of the female and child labour, for various agricultural operations, is drawn from this class. Under casual employment they receive cash wages, but in permanent employments their daily wages are supplemented by a customary grain allowance at harvests. Often they have to move from farm to farm in different cropping seasons but they are seldom forced to leave the village for lack of employment.

The last group represents the miscellaneous labour which requires no special skill or experience beyond what a coolie may be expected to acquire in the ordinary course of his career. This class is always mobile because its demand or supply is closely regulated by agricultural and industrial seasons. In Bihar and the eastern districts of the U.P., unspecified labourers migrate in vast numbers from the fields to the mines, and thence to public works and industrial centres in different parts of the year. They have no land and no capital, and their labour is not specialized. Therefore, during agricultural seasons, they lie at the mercy of well-to-do cultivators, and in the off seasons depend on urban factories for a livelihood. Their labour is always undefined and their wages unregulated, and though for tasks of unskilled nature, they are of great importance in agriculture, they are not absolutely necessary and indispensably precious.

There is no hard and fast rule by which the task of each class is differentiated in actual practice, but to a certain extent caste regulates the nature of work which falls to the lot of each group. Owner cultivators, in general, cultivate their hereditary lands and

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**belong to higher castes. Cultivating tenants form the rural middle classes, and belong to castes whose traditional occupation has been agriculture. Farm hands are drawn mainly from poorer classes of the village. But on the lowest rung of the economic ladder stand the unspecified labourers drawn from all castes and classes to perform ordinary coolie work on starvation wages.**

Thus we conclude that the population engaged in agriculture is **not** homogeneous, but is differentiated into various strata as described above, i.e. those of owner-labourers, tenant-workers and landless proletariat. The basic significance of rural labour problems can be understood only when there is a clear idea of the fundamental conditions distinguishing one class from the other. In the following pages the chief characteristics of these groups are presented with elaborate discussions on questions of economic and social relationships.

## CHAPTER II.

### GENERAL LABOUR CONDITIONS IN INDIA.

*The Present Agrarian Situation:* The problems of land and labour in India, as in all the agricultural countries of the world, are the most significant amongst national questions. Indian agriculture exhibits a wide diversity of land systems and policies, each cast into its characteristic regional framework of economic and social life, with its separate inevitable reactions on the status of the peasants. The factors which have governed the evolution of different types of land holdings and village communal life have been so welded together into an organic whole that a final analysis of them is almost an impossible task. The problems which thus arise are, therefore, not only complex and difficult, but often misleading to the present academic economists, whose conclusions are almost always vitiated by Western norms and notions, which hardly apply to Indian conditions. Although political conquests have left deep marks on the rural economy of India and influenced the growth of manorial estates and feudal types of village organisation, which represent characteristic features of the rural economy of the European countries, the time-honoured village communal organisations still largely govern the transformation of the relations of the agricultural population. The present agricultural regime has not only given rise to feudal holdings and absentee landlordism, but has completely ignored the village communal rights which once balanced the drawbacks of peasant farming. The social and economic history of the origin and development of village communities, therefore, has yet to cover much new ground, and the future of Indian agrarian reform should have room for the introduction of some common feature into the land policies of various provinces, with a view to safeguarding the interests of the actual tillers of the soil, whether they are cultivating owners, tenant cultivators, or landless serfs.

The problems of land are intimately bound up with those of human labour. Whenever the *land* has been touched, its reactions have been felt deep in the roots of the rural society. The present agricultural depression is largely the result of encroachments and defective land administration, and the Indian peasant has suffered

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gravely from these periodical settlements and exactions which have left him nothing more than skin and bone. In view of these disturbances, almost all the Provincial Governments of India have been contemplating some measure of land reform to stabilize agricultural conditions. But the most unfortunate feature of these reforms has been the entire neglect of certain broad features of agrarian discontent in different parts of the country. The Government policy towards the varied landed interests has suffered from a narrow provincial outlook, and therefore peasant proprietorship and tenancy, recently, have undergone significant changes.

Tenancy legislation has, so far, failed to give adequate protection to the 'toiling, unorganised, long-suffering, but all-important factor in the machinery of Indian rural life.'<sup>1</sup> The great mistake of tenancy reform has been that, in its effort to recreate peasant proprietorship, it created the right of sale and purchase, whereby the superior proprietor, and sometimes the surrendering tenant as well, have extorted some profit from the transaction. In Bengal, Bihar, and the U.P., owing to the increase of population and the competition for holdings, the evil has been considerably aggravated. In the U.P., owing to the creation of permanent heritable rights, the system of taking premiums from the tenants has prevailed and the practices of levying *Nazrana* and illegal enhancements of rents in various guises are not unusual. In almost all the northern provinces the professional and moneyed classes have aspired to become small landlords by buying out the original ryots. Their land is cultivated by hired labour or by uprooted tenants on share agreements without any legal status. The rapid increase of this class has not only created absentee rent-receivers and an inferior peasantry, but it has multiplied the chain of sub-infeudatories and intermediaries. Evils of this type have not been combated as yet by legislation. The constitution of the economic holdings, prevention of fresh sub-division, restriction of transfer and subletting, protection of the inferior peasantry who obtain land or stock from the richer farmers, and the suppression of illegal exactions—all demand protective legislation. There are, then, the landless labourers hiring out their labour from plot to plot, involved in debt, and eking out a miserable existence verging on starvation. Even more pathetic is the condition of the serfs! Bound hand and foot from generation to generation and restricted in their movements, they deserve much greater attention and sympathy than as yet they have been able to attract.

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<sup>1</sup>"Land Problems of India", Radhakamal Mukerjee, p. 239.

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These features of agrarian discontent have rendered the situation both pathetic and tragic. Pathetic, because, the agricultural labourers who looked to the trustees of land (Zamindars and the State) for some measure of protection and relief have been betrayed to their doom; and tragic, because this betrayal may be the presage of the trustees' own disaster. This is the result of an outstanding defect of policy, an error of principle and method, which has marked not only our relations within the country but also with other nations. The "*Pons asinorum*" of our agricultural policy has been that the state refuses to face a situation which has not actually arisen, or to shape a policy, or to give undertakings, in respect of it. It prefers to deal with each issue as and when it arises. Dangerously acting on such a principle we often change policy radically and act quickly when the event is upon us, with the result that neither is the existing situation controlled nor the future safeguarded.

*Recent Trends in the Rural Economy of India:* The beginning years of the twentieth century which mark the present transition from the communal type of farming to the individual system of economic toil, have been associated with a host of new tendencies which have intensified the problems of agrarian unsettlement in the country. The economic retrogression in India began with the vast migration and shifting of population within various occupations. From 1891-1911 nearly 23 million people deserted industrial occupations in favour of agriculture. During 1911-21 another 10 million were drawn to agriculture. This transference from the various industrial pursuits to agriculture during the three decades (1891-1921) has been at the expense of rural, and even urban, industrial population.<sup>2</sup>

These mighty changes were accomplished by the dire necessity on the part of the rural Indian population to part with their hereditary occupations. The rise in agricultural prices during 1911-21 and the realization of large profits attracted vast numbers to agriculture. But unfortunately agriculture could not offer them a position better than that of petty time-serving cultivators without any staying power. Moreover, the pressure on land steadily increased, and soon its consequences were marked in rural society. The Royal Commission on Labour observed that, "over large parts of India the number of persons on the land is much greater than the number required to cultivate it and appreciably in excess of the

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<sup>2</sup>Industrial Decline in India—Balkrishna p. 30.

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number it can comfortably support."<sup>3</sup> But this tendency was not long-lived. The closing years of the last decade\* have seen the turn of the tide. From 1928 agricultural calamities came thick and fast, and once more a movement of both small tenants and agricultural labourers towards the large towns set in. Agriculture has now considerably lost to industry, but those hands who could not be absorbed by non-agricultural occupations have fallen into the ranks of unspecified labourers and landless serfs. The growth of this huge floating immigrant population has not only weakened our rural stability, but is in large measure responsible for the present industrial unrest. Labour legislation and housing reform, and the economic amelioration of the rural masses cannot be effective until the continuous cityward drift of the floating farm hands is checked by more accommodating measures.

Secondly, there has been a tendency during the recent years for the peasant proprietors to lose ground to tenant cultivators. There is again the tendency for land to concentrate in hands of the non-cultivating rent-receivers. The chain of sub-infeudation has often gone to grotesque lengths and has given rise to the same abuses which are characteristic of the latifundia farming in the West.

Finally, the outstanding feature, whose effects are not confined to pure economic sphere, has been the dislocation of rural social solidarity and the disintegration of village communal life. The significant changes in rural community life, due to the introduction of western notions of property and tenancy legislation, have produced new factors in the evolution of civic social reform and national democracy. The growing recognition of peasant organizations and the rising tide of socialistic ideas are soon converting the masses into forces actively against the traditional regime. Owing to the increasing urban contact, the rural society is changing with rather bewildering rapidity, and the fusion of economic and political elements as the foundation of our national policies and programmes is likely to change the whole outlook on social life.

*From Peasant Proprietor to Peasant Proletariat:* There is going on a silent process of expropriation of the peasant proprietor. Landlordism, both of superior and inferior grades, has tended to produce a land-hungry peasantry, and the small holders, over-

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<sup>3</sup>Vol. I, p. 14.

\*1921-1931

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whelmed by these circumstances, are declining from peasant proprietary to peasant proletariat.

Peasant proprietorship in India has been weakened, not merely by the decline of village communities, which had outgrown their administrative use, but also by minute fragmentation resulting inevitably from an unchecked population pressure. Owing to the free mortgage and transfer of land and the decline of subsidiary cottage industries, the peasants have been driven off the land to supplement the proceeds of their holdings by outside work, or to sell their lands to middlemen or to more prosperous peasants. In other cases they have been forced to relinquish their land to the non-agricultural classes from whom they cultivate as tenants-at-will. Consequently, land has been concentrated, firstly, in the hands of large proprietors; and secondly, to the detriment of the whole country, in the hands of the non-agricultural classes. In the United Provinces the non-agriculturists gained +654,000 acres whereas the agriculturists (specially Brahmans, Tagas and Bhuinhars) gained only +418,000 acres between 1907-1926.<sup>4</sup> The U.P. Banking Enquiry Committee in 1930 gave the figures for land concentration in the hands of non-agriculturists at +107,000 acres, and +179,000 acres by Brahmans and other agriculturists.<sup>5</sup> In the Punjab, during the quinquennium 1922-1927, nearly 37 per cent of the vendors (owners of land) sold off the whole of their land and became landless.<sup>6</sup> The sales of land in Jessore have increased by nearly 40 per cent. In Mymensingh district 25 per cent. of the total agricultural area changes hands every ten years; in Jessore 15 per cent. and in Midnapur 7 per cent. In Birbhum, Murshidabad and Burdwan also a large portion of land has fallen into the hands of foreign money-lending classes.<sup>7</sup> In the United Provinces during 1921-31, about 60 per cent. of the transferred land has passed into the hands of non-agriculturists, generally the creditors of the dispossessed owners.<sup>8</sup> In some parts of the rural east the invasion of the Bania, the Marwari and the Dikku has been an economic menace. These money-lenders gradually become finan-

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<sup>4</sup>Figures collected by Revenue Department, 1926-27.

<sup>5</sup>Report—1929-30. Vol. 1, p. 125. (Figures are based on the Settlement Reports of the five Districts in U.P.—i.e., Lucknow, Agra, Unao, Badaun, and Partabgarh).

<sup>6</sup>A note on sales of land—by Cyril P. K. Fazal—1931. (The Board of Economic Enquiry, Punjab—Rural Section Publication)

<sup>7</sup>Land Problems of India—Radhakamal Mukerjee—pp. 268-269.

<sup>8</sup>Census of U.P., Part I—1931, p. 47.



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cier-proprietors by ousting the peasantry by mortgages and land alienations. Having acquired the land as a money investment they seldom cultivate it by hired labour, but make the old occupancy raiyat an under-tenant who is forced to pay a produce rent irrespective of the yield. Redemptions are few. Thus, while the money-lending classes seldom lose a favourable opportunity of gaining land by loan-investments, the peasantry becomes indolent, litigious, and impoverished and gradually vanishes struggling to regain its usurped crown.<sup>9</sup>

Equally disastrous have been the results of the transfer of land among the agricultural classes. Small owners have to an appreciable extent been bought out by large landowners. Even where the small owners have sold to small owners and the big owners to big owners, the tendency of concentration on the one hand, and expropriation of the peasant proprietor on the other, is not insignificant. In the United Provinces 40 per cent. of the transferred land passed on to other agriculturists, notably the Rajputs and Muslims.<sup>10</sup> The dispossessed landowners who belonged to higher castes are usually the poor type of cultivators. In 1928 in the Punjab the total number of owners with holdings of one acre or less was 625,400 against 904,000 of cultivators in the same class—the difference accounting for over one-third of the landless cultivators.<sup>11</sup> The increase in the number of farm hands and field workers from 291 to 407 per mille cultivators during 1921-31, without a corresponding increase in the actual holders of land, whether as tenants or farm hands, is sufficient explanation for the large increase in the landless class.<sup>12</sup> The strength of the landless field workers has grown immensely during the past decades. There are at present 24,925,357 hired agricultural workers who have no interest in land even as tenant cultivators. Including the number of unspecified labourers, who constitute an important fund of labour for agriculture, the number of landless workers will swell to 32,703,999. If by 'landless' is meant the absence of ownership, no less than 66,877,903 peasants were found in 1931,<sup>13</sup> constituting more than two-thirds of the labour population engaged in cultivation. Even if we were to assume that these tenant culti-

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<sup>9</sup>Rent Rate and Settlement Report, Hazaribagh, Sifted, paras 265-269.

<sup>10</sup>U.P. Census Report, Part 1, 1931 Chapter I, para 48.

<sup>11</sup>Size and Distribution of Cultivators Holdings—Calvert—p. 8.

<sup>12</sup>Census of India, 1931, Vol. 1, Part I. para 124, p. 288.

<sup>13</sup>Census of India, 1931, Vol. 1, Part I. Chap. VIII, p. 287 (calculated).

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vators will mostly become cultivating owners as a result of the establishment of permanency of tenure for them, we find that more than one-third of the total number of agricultural labourers are landless workers having no greater stake in the land than their meagre and insufficient wages.<sup>14</sup>

*The Growth of the Unspecified Class:* The unspecified class of labour, as distinguished from ordinary field-workers and farm hands, deserves special mention in connection with agriculture. The relative figures of unspecified labourers, along with agricultural labourers, serve to some extent as an index to the prosperity of agriculture. This class is of recent growth and its number fluctuates with agricultural seasons, because fairly large numbers of this class work as field workers as occasion offers.

The occupation of "unspecified labourers" is inadequately described. The term covers a multitude of persons performing different kinds of work, sometimes skilled and sometimes not, but usually merged in the class of general labourers. There is always a considerable demand for the miscellaneous labour which calls for no special skill or training beyond what an ordinary coolie may expect to acquire in the ordinary course of his career. Labourers of this kind emigrate in thousands from various districts of the U.P. and north Bihar to Bengal for temporary employment in seasonal urban industries, construction and repair of roads and railways, repair of buildings and bridges, and a thousand and one minor activities of local character.<sup>15</sup>

The demand and supply of unspecified labourers is very largely regulated by seasons. During the sowing and harvesting seasons openings for them are fairly plentiful when the demand for and the price of agricultural labour rises. On an average, their labour on the fields and in other agricultural operations is not required for more than three months, therefore for nine months in the year they migrate to Sugar Industries, Lac Works, Public Works, etc.<sup>16</sup> If the Census were held in July, November or March, a large number of persons will be shown as agricultural labourers, but if it were taken in May and June the ranks of agricultural labourers will be thinned out proportionately in favour of the unspecified class.

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<sup>14</sup>Peasants and Congress, Ranga, 1939, p. 21.

<sup>15</sup>Bihar and Orissa Census Report 1921 Vol. VII, Part I, p. 268.

<sup>16</sup>Survey and Settlement Operations, District Hazaribagh, Bridges.

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The enormous increase of ordinary cultivators during the decade 1911-21 has been an unmixed evil. Its consequences were a greater pressure on the soil, more undersized holdings, and therefore diminished profits from agriculture. The cultivators were without any staying power and the crash in the prices of agricultural produce from 1928 forced the marginal cultivators to relinquish their land to non-agriculturists. Since the prevailing economic conditions did not allow the cultivators to keep a large number of workers, they had to seek employment in the rural tracts as earth-workers, collectors of fuel-wood and forest products, failing which the only resort was to move out to urban industrial centres. On the other hand, the divorce of agricultural labourers from the field by under-tenure-holders of Bihar, Orissa, Bengal, and the eastern U.P., during the last decade,\* explains the enormous increase of the unspecified class in these districts.

The sudden increase of non-cultivating rent-receivers is responsible for excessive subletting, specially in the permanently settled areas where sub-infeudation has grown to a far-reaching degree. In such cases the sub-tenants, with faint hopes of rising in prosperity, are enlisted only among the unsettled raiyats, temporary and seasonal, but they do not altogether give up their former occupation in suburban mills, mines, and forests, and adopt agriculture only as a subsidiary means of livelihood. This class of sub-tenants is always unsettled, and although one member of the family may permanently look after the family holding, the rest of the members (of both sexes) move about in the capacity of unspecified labourers—unskilled, seasonal and unorganized. During 1921-31 the actual workers occupied in pasture and agriculture decreased by 2.4 per cent., but it is certain that this supplanted force of workers strengthened the ranks of unspecified labourers. The variation in the number of unspecified labourers has to be examined along with the number of the agricultural labourers and ordinary cultivators, because each class feeds the other at different intervals. The percentage of variations of these three classes is given below:—

	1911-21	1921-31
Ordinary cultivators	—	—18.06
Agricultural labourers	—8.1	+2.2
Labourers and workmen unspecified	+12.4	+30.8

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\*1921-1931.

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During 1911-21 the increase in the number of ordinary cultivators was due to the decrease in the number of field labourers, but the increase of 12.4 per cent. in the unspecified class is due to the fact that a large number of villagers had abandoned their hereditary industrial pursuits in the face of machine competition. During 1921-31 the decrease in the number of cultivators is chiefly due to the significant decrease in owner-cultivators and marginal cultivators who had set up during the period of the agricultural boom of 1914-20. This floating population expelled from actual cultivation, plus a sufficiently large number of dependents who find no avenues of employment these days, owing to the severe agricultural depression, account for the swelling of the number of labourers and workmen unspecified."

For all practical purposes the 'unspecified' and 'general' workers are ordinary agricultural labourers, and therefore, the classification of this class of labourers is doubtless confusing. Another class of labourers which is casually employed in agriculture comes from the group "Domestic Services". The increase of female workers in this class is due to their disappearance from the field-workers' class. In 1931 these would have appeared as workers in agricultural occupations assisting their male workers or working independently.

In 1931 there were 7,778,642 labourers and workmen unspecified in India, an increase of about 31 per cent. since 1921, and nearly 45 per cent since 1911. In the U.P., Bihar and Orissa, and Bengal, there is an increase of 20, 46 and 46 per cent. respectively, due to forests, mines and public work programmes, but the unexpected decrease of 0.4 per cent. in the Punjab is due chiefly to the unspecified workers returning themselves as agricultural labourers.

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<sup>17</sup>In the four provinces of northern India the per cent variation during 1921-31 was as follows:—

Province	Cultivators	Agricultural labourers.	Labourers unspecified.
1. Bengal	—34.9	+51.6	+46.0
2. Bihar and Orissa	—15.5	+19.8	+46.4
3. United Provinces	—13.0	+36.0	+20.0
4. Punjab	+24.7	+58.7	— 0.4

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During 1911-21 there was a general fall in the number of unspecified labourers in nearly all the provinces of India owing to the apparent increase in the number of ordinary cultivators, but once again there set in a "flight from the land" movement, which swelled the ranks of unspecified workers and landless serfs during the decade 1921-31.

*The Present Labour Force:* In 1931 there were in India 93,884,003 agricultural labourers as against 102,287,706 in 1921. Of these more than half (about fifty millions) were found in the Punjab, the U.P., Bihar and Bengal. These figures indicate a decrease of —8.1 per cent. during the decade 1921-31. If we take into account only the field workers and farm hands according to the definition of the Census, we would find that their number during 1921-31 rose from 21,676,107 to 24,925,357, or by nearly fifteen per cent. This rise was also evident in all the provinces of northern India: e.g. Punjab, +58.7; U.P., +36; Bihar and Orissa, +19.8; and Bengal, +51 per cent. The total strength of this class of labourers in these four provinces, therefore, is somewhere about 11 million persons. This class of labourers is, however, of less economic importance than the tenants and owner-cultivators, forming as it does only 21% of the agricultural labour population. Nevertheless, these are the people who, when agricultural disasters occur, feel the pinch first, for they have no reserve and are the first to be thrown out of employment. During the past decade the field labourers have increased enormously and in many districts this change has been only for the worse. In four districts of the Punjab i.e. (Bahawalpur, Attock, Suket, and Kapurthala), there is an increase of over 200%; of over 100 and below 200% in five districts, between 50-100 per cent. in seven districts, and 20-50 per cent. in the three contiguous districts.<sup>18</sup> In the U.P. the greatest proportion of field workers to tenants occurs in Jhansi, where there are 2 to every 3 tenants, and in Meerut, where the proportion is 1 to every 2 tenants.<sup>19</sup> Similarly, in the districts of Shahabad, Champaran and Hazaribagh, the ranks of this class of labourers have considerably been swelled.\*

If we include the unspecified class of workers and farm hands, it would give the number at 32,703,999 labourers in 1931. But this again cannot be taken as final for our purposes, as it constitutes

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<sup>18</sup>Census of Punjab—1931, Part I, p. 220.

<sup>19</sup>Census of U.P.—1931, Part I, p. 398.

\*Census Report of Bihar and Orissa, 1931, Part I, and Final Reports on Survey and Settlement Operations in the Districts concerned.

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barely one-third of the labour power under consideration. We, therefore, arrive at our final figure by taking into account the labour of all workers directly employed in cultivation, whether in the capacity of owner cultivators, tenant cultivators, field workers and farm hands, and the unspecified labourers. Thus we find that of the total number of agricultural labourers no less than one-third are floating farm-hands and more than two-thirds are landless.

*Signs of Unrest:* The kaleidoscopic changes which have taken place in the rural economy of India in the course of the past decades have brought the country in the throes of a mighty economic transition. These dismal changes taking place with somewhat bewildering rapidity have been fraught with struggles and sufferings of a magnitude unknown in the annals of any country. They have disrupted the industrial and social fabric of the whole Indian life and have produced an array of problems of socio-economic nature which are an index to the present social and economic unrest. The administrative machinery has undergone rapid changes. Mahatma Gandhi has awakened the masses and Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru has made the economic problem the vital issue; and the new constitution has, at a single step, diffused political power among the ignorant poverty-stricken masses and placed the Indian National Congress in power in almost all the provinces. In the Congress camp socialism and communism dominate the minds of the leaders who stand at the helm of peasants' and workers' organizations. The Congress has declared a war against all imperialistic institutions and has engendered a new spirit among the peasantry. It is really marvellous to see how political power under Mahatma Gandhi's leadership is passing to the people without violence. India is entering upon a great adventure and the Congress, which represents the unvocal classes, is soon establishing itself in the hearts of ruling classes and the minorities. This political unrest in India, aggravated by the international political chaos, has made the situation not only serious but alarming.

Serious difficulties, associated mainly with agriculture, persist in the economic sphere, and the solution of outstanding economic problems would be largely helped or hindered by political circumstances. The faint rumblings of peasant class consciousness, already audible in some parts of India, challenge the present regime. We see already the signs of peasant awakening in the growth of rural socio-political organizations, such as the Mazdur Sabhas, the Kisan Sanghs, the Peasant Unions, and active combinations against the

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absentee landlords. There has grown a universal contempt for the zamindar class which is accused of exploiting the poor and ignorant labourers by levying *abwabs* and extracting forced labour. Agrarian crimes have taken the form of grain riots, strikes, arson and bazar looting, and kisan-zamindar clashes have become things of everyday occurrence. This mass point of view is articulated in the country's social and political programmes under the Congress regime, and the whole structure of the village life is being moulded on new foundations of social and economic relativity.

The alarming growth of the landless and unspecified class of labourers, and the decline of actual tillers of the soil, has created a dangerous situation in rural society. It is no denying the fact that over large parts of India the number of persons on the land is much greater than the number required to cultivate it, and appreciably in excess of the number it can comfortably support. This floating population is increasing at a rapid rate and is not only seriously disrupting the man-land ratio in the rural areas, but is also creating great unrest in the urban centres. "The problem of industrial unrest in the cities," observes Dr. Radhakamal Mukerjee, "is connected closely with the growth of the landless class in the villages, which is both a social and economic menace to the country."<sup>20</sup>

The balance of rural urban industries is likely to be disturbed when almost the entire labour force is recruited from village areas.<sup>21</sup> The social composition of industrial and mining centres in India is characterized by the dominance of a large floating immigrant population, drawn casually from contiguous rural districts. This class cannot be allotted either to rural or urban population. Thus, in the first instance, the cities and mining centres depend on the periodical reinforcement of adult male labour, and secondly, the industries spell the breaking up of the labourer's family by his temporary removal.<sup>22</sup>

The present agrarian situation in India is, therefore, full of grave peril, and conditions such as these adequately prognosticate the calamities that are likely to shatter national prosperity and lead the country to an economic ruin. "The economic position of the small holder", observes Dr. Radhakamal Mukerjee, "has deteriorat-

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<sup>20</sup>Mukerji, op. cit., p. 11.

<sup>21</sup>"The Indian Peasant Uprooted", Read, p. 12.

<sup>22</sup>Lorenzo, A. M., *Ecological Processes in the Formation of Rural Social Communities in Northern India—Original Pamphlet, 1934*, p. 10.

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ed, while the contrast between the landlords and expropriated peasants, between the increasing class of rent-receivers and the toiling agricultural serfs, betokens a critical stage in our agricultural history."<sup>23</sup> The problem, in its true perspective, is not so much that of land as of the social and political reactions on those who live on it and from it. The history of European rural discontent bears testimony to the fact that village unsettlement and wider political disturbances have a direct and complementary relationship. France and Russia could not avert their agrarian crisis except by a bloody revolution, and the fact that the Indian situation has of late risen to that level, presents a timely warning for the serious consideration both of the economist and the statesman.

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<sup>23</sup>Land Problem of India—op. cit. p. 4.



## CHAPTER III

### CASTE AND LABOUR

*The Significance of Caste in Agriculture:* Caste is the bedrock of rural life in India. It represents the chief norm according to which the economic action and life-history of the peasants is interwoven with complex caste traditions and heirarchical stratifications. Any striking change in economic activity of the community is accompanied by a social differentiation and *vice versa*. These changes are noticeable not only in the lower strata of social gradation, but also in upper grades, where the social scheme relatively affects the pursuit of occupation and economic status.<sup>1</sup>

Rural economy would collapse if the structure of caste were taken away. Around caste are stratified not only the holdings and tenures, solvency and indebtedness, income and occupation, social status and civic obligations, but the whole network of rural Indian life crystallized and brought to the forefront.

Agriculture has always been followed by groups of diverse origin and social rank, and it has been therefore impossible for them to form a definite agricultural guild or unite in a single caste. It is relevant to assume that after the Aryan invasion each successive invading tribe must have settled on the conquered land and taken to agriculture. Thus we find that agriculture was an occupation too widespread to produce any effect on the evolution of social system, except in so far as it must always have been an occupation held in some esteem, and its adoption by persons who followed other trades must have tended to improve their social status.<sup>2</sup>

An analysis of the agricultural castes would therefore be as follows:—

- (1) Agriculture is the traditional occupation of a large number of castes, whereas each main trade is followed by a single caste.

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<sup>1</sup>"*Caste and Credit in the Rural Area*", Nehru, Introduction by Dr. Radhakamal Mukerjee.

<sup>2</sup>*Megasthenes* classified the people of India into seven groups (303 B.C.) and placed in the second rank the husbandmen, who formed the bulk of the population as they do still. He had also mentioned the social privileges of these husbandmen accruing from their economic status.

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- (2) These agricultural castes are of varied origin—i.e. the Kurmis claim a Kshatriya descent; the Gujar, Jat, Bhat, Lodh come from aboriginal invading tribes; the Dom and Chamar from Sudras; and the Sain from Brahmins.
- (3) Agriculture is traditionally associated with castes which have other subsidiary occupations also. The Bhuinhar and Taga who claim Brahmin origin and the Rajputs who represent Kshatriyas, are traditionally land-holders, but they have other occupations also (trade and industry) which they follow as subsidiary occupations.
- (4) Many castes whose traditional occupation is non-agricultural, follow it as a subsidiary occupation to agriculture. The Guriyas (Fishermen), Telis (oil-pressers) and Chamars (leather workers), who form the bulk of agricultural labourers and small scale cultivators, have a tendency to return agriculture as their principal occupation and sometimes they claim it even as their traditional occupation.

It is difficult to assign to any caste a definite occupation, or group of allied occupations, with which it is intimately associated. In the case of functional castes the association is traditional, preceding and actually causing their function. In the case of other castes, the association, though merely incidental, or even accidental, is quite as ancient as it is in the case of functional castes. Blunt observed that the modern Ahirs, whose traditional occupation is cattle-keeping, descend from Abhiras, a pastoral tribe which dates back at least as far as the beginning of the Christian era. The connection of most agricultural castes with agriculture must also date back to the birth of caste itself.<sup>3</sup>

The extent to which different castes hold land both as ancestral owners and proprietor-landlords varies from region to region, but all over northern India, one fact stands out prominent, that higher castes, e.g. Brahmins, Thakurs and Saiyids, constitute the bulk of land owners, whereas, the lower castes have a privileged pre-eminence among cultivating-tenants and landless labourers.

The agricultural population cannot be called a homogeneous group. The inclusion of Kayasthas, Kalwars, Pasis, Telis, Kahars, Dhimars, Gadariyas, etc., in the ranks of cultivators and field workers has swelled the agricultural population and there is everywhere to be marked a pressure of population on land. Recent tendencies in all parts of India exhibit a loose attachment to traditional occupa-

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<sup>3</sup>Caste System in Northern India—1933.

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tions, and caste, with the decline of its social and religious superimpositions, is soon yielding ground to the new class system which has been imported from the economic system of the West. The decay of village communities has brought about a social as well as an occupational confusion in the villages, and now it is an arduous task to analyse the rural community by distinguishing its separate functional groups.

*Dynamics of Caste:* With the progress of western civilization and the pressure of circumstances, the institution of caste has been materially modified. Not only do we find a marked change in the caste-customs and usages, there is also an abandonment of the traditional occupation. The principle of hereditary function has ceased to be universally recognized as binding. It should also be mentioned that the efforts of social and religious reformers and the disintegrating forces of modern life have impaired in a serious degree the vitality of caste.

Since 1921 there is another strong tendency for persons low in the caste scale to press their claims to higher social status. This attitude has been strengthened by the recent development of the caste Sabhas, or Societies, whose purpose is to advance the position and welfare of the caste. Not only do the members of the same caste make different claims as to their origin in different parts of the province; but they claim new caste names without as a rule considering themselves to be of different castes or sub-castes or applying caste or sub-caste restrictions against one another.<sup>4</sup> The possible explanation for such nominal conversions is the desire for economic or social status in these times when rigidity of caste leaves a narrow margin for livelihood, and obstructs any possible step upwards in the social ladder.

Owing to such superior claims by the lower occupational castes the total Brahmanic Hindu population of the U.P. increased by 5.7 per cent. during the decade 1921-31. Similarly, the Rajputs have increased by 8.3 per cent., Saiyids by 11.7 per cent., and Sheikhs by 10.7 per cent.<sup>5</sup> There are various movements at work in India to induce people to return themselves as of no caste, or to consolidate the sub-castes of one origin into one main caste, with a view to raising their social and ultimately political status. Such forces in the near future will do a great deal to bring about drastic changes in the proportion of occupational castes.

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<sup>4</sup>Census of U.P. 1931.—Part I, p. 528.

<sup>5</sup>Census Report, U.P.—1931, Part I, pp. 500-530.

## CASTE AND LABOUR

The occupational division of rural population has produced a host of agricultural sub-castes which claim their origin entirely to their functional attitudes. In this changing action many castes have gone high and others low in social status. The Bhuinhars and Tagas who claim to be Brahmins, by giving up their priestly occupations and taking up a secular life of agricultural labourers, have been socially degraded. The Doms and Guriyas, by leaving their degraded occupations in favour of cultivation, have risen in social status. Similarly the Singhariyas and Kahars, the Chamars and Koris, the Balhars and Basors—have all gone a step forward in the social ladder simply by taking to agriculture. On the other hand, the Mahabrahmins and Dakauts, the Bhunjas and Bhatyas, the Gujars and Bhats have been socially degraded.

Such changes in occupations have been so frequent and complicated that it still remains an arduous task to assign the real traditional occupation to each caste. If *traditional* is interpreted to mean the occupation with which a caste has been associated in the past, it cannot be proved whether the formation of caste was functional, and how this attitude has been traditional. Many new castes which have returned their traditional occupation to be agriculture, are not tied down by custom and caste to agriculture, as Barhais are to woodwork, Lohars to working with iron, Sonars to working in precious metals which are their traditional pursuits.<sup>6</sup>

There are many castes which are soon abandoning their traditional occupations, or making them subsidiary to agricultural pursuits. In the U. P. this tendency has been most marked, as will be seen from the following statement:—<sup>7</sup>

Caste	Traditional Occupation	Percentage of workers who returned their traditional caste occupation as their principal occupation.
Pasis	Toddy-drawers	2
Kewats	Boatmen, fishermen	5
Chamars	Leather workers	5
Kalwars	Distillers, toddy-drawers	6
Brahmins	Priests and mendicants	8
Bhats	Bards and geneologists	9

<sup>6</sup>Census of U. P., Vol. XVIII, Part I, P. 408.

<sup>6</sup>Census of U.P. Part II, Imperial Table XI, p. 438.

<sup>7</sup>Census Report, U.P.—Part I, pp. 408-409.

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A great majority of the remaining earners of these castes returned as principal occupation some agricultural or pastoral head. Similarly 60 to 80 per cent of Kayasthas, Lohars, Kahars, Khatiks, Luniyas, Dhuniyas, Gadariyas, etc., and 50 to 60 per cent. of Julahas, Khattris, Telis, Barhais, and Kumhars earned their incomes from occupations (chiefly agriculture) other than their true traditional occupation. In the majority of these cases a considerable number returned their traditional occupation as their subsidiary source of income. It is only a few selected castes which are still working at their traditional occupation.<sup>8</sup>

Caste	Traditional Occupation	Percentage of workers (principal occupation)
Bhuinhars	Landowners & cultivators	94 (96)
Sainthwars	Cultivators	92 (98)
Tagas	Landowners & cultivators	90 (96)
Arakhs	Cultivators & agricultural Labourers.	88 (92)
Lodhs	do. do.	88 (91)
Jats	Landowners & cultivators	87 (94)
Kurmis	Cultivators	84 (95)
Koris	Cultivators	83 (94)

N.B. Figures within brackets show the increase of percentage if we add the other agricultural and pastoral pursuits.

In order to ascertain what changes have occurred during the decade 1921-1931, the working dependents who returned the traditional occupation must be added to those who returned this as their principal occupation. Below is given the proportion to all workers of earners (principal occupation) plus working dependents, and of earners (subsidiary occupation) of selected castes, who returned their traditional occupation in 1911 and 1931.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>8</sup>Census of U. P., Part I, 1931, p. 408.

<sup>9</sup>Census of U.P., 1931, Part I, p. 409 (compiled).

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*Table I—showing the Increase per mille since 1911.*

Caste	No. per mille of workers who returned their traditional caste occupation.		
	1931 Principal or subsidiary	1911 Principal or subsidiary	Variation per mille
Khatik	251	153	+98
Kayastha	377	337	+40
Dhobi	639	601	+38
Nai	635	598	+37
Kewat	49	13	+36
Luniya	139	111	+28
Lohar	439	418	+21
Pasi	26	8	+18
Barhai	544	531	+13
Chamar	57	48	+ 9

*Table II—showing the decrease per mille since 1911.*

Caste	No. per mille of workers who returned their traditional caste occupation		
	1931 Principal or subsidiary	1911 Principal or subsidiary	Variation per mille.
Bhangis	661	788	—127
Kurmis	749	845	—96
Halwai	589	683	—94
Kori	802	880	—78
Lodh	801	864	—63
Julaha	466	519	—53
Kumhar	460	511	—51
Teli	488	518	—30
Gadariya	262	288	—26
Brahman	97	114	—17

It will be observed from the above tables that generally those castes who have the lower proportion working at their traditional occupation show some increase, while those who have higher proportion show some decrease followed by Chamars, Luniyas, Dhobis, etc., which is due mainly to the bulk of them returning the tradi-

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tional occupation as a subsidiary occupation. A very notable decrease occurs in the case of Bhangis who are taking up other occupations. The Kumhar is being ousted from his traditional occupation to some extent by the introduction of metal utensils and the popularity and cheapness of aluminium. The Teli has lost ground in the face of machine competition, and similarly other castes have gone low during the last two decades owing to the change in the social and economic outlook of the whole country. The castes, mentioned in table II, who have deserted their traditional occupations, are mostly enlisted either among the landless agricultural labourers or ordinary coolies in urban factories, specially the sugar factories of the U. P. and Bihar.

Moreover, many castes who have returned the traditional occupation of their caste as their principal source of income, supplement that income by following some subsidiary occupation. The proportions are large in the case of Ahirs, Barhais, Bhats, Chamars, Bluinhars, Kumhars, Lohars, Pasis, Telis, etc. With the exception of Koris and Rajputs, the traditional occupation is other than actual cultivation. The bulk of the subsidiary occupations of all these castes is agricultural or pastoral.<sup>10</sup>

Caste as a dynamic institution changes in harmony with the relativity of economic and social life. Nesfield's idea of differentiation of function, therefore, can safely be regarded as the nucleus of all sub-castes.<sup>11</sup> The Jatakas suggest a distribution of occupation by village, and the formation of new villages in Bengal and Orissa convey sufficient data to demonstrate how new occupational castes grew out automatically to make the village self-sufficient and self-contained, in return for free grants of land known as "Chakran jagir". This distribution may seem to be primitive, nevertheless it has, in no small degree, stabilized the functional castes. Functional groups of this kind tend to perpetuate inherited aptitude and improve and conserve the social processes and technique. But such groups may adopt new occupations without submitting to their severe caste rules of occupational rigidity.

Hutton beautifully summarizes the tendency of vertical mobility in various provinces of India, where agriculture is absorbing a number of castes hitherto engaged principally in non-agricultural occupations. He maintains that in the majority of cases about half the males tabulated retain their traditional occupation and varying

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<sup>10</sup>Census Report, U.P. 1931, Part I, p. 410.

<sup>11</sup>Brief View of the Caste System of the N.W.P. and Oudh (1885).

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numbers up to, but rarely exceeding, a quarter, have other subsidiary occupations. About a quarter or less of the half that have abandoned their hereditary occupations as their principal means of subsistence retain them as subsidiary.<sup>12</sup> In the past the tendency towards hereditary occupation was very strong and changes in occupation frequently led to changes in the constitution of the caste and the status of the individual.<sup>13</sup> But in these times, as a rule, change of function takes place without, in the least, materially changing the constitution of the caste or the status of the member. Moreover, such occupational changes are merely transfers of temporary nature, and though the new and the old occupations be entirely different, community of interest is not sacrificed between their respective followers.

Thus we arrive at our socio-economic conclusion that caste is not a static but a dynamic social institution. It is modified by the nature of occupations followed by the caste-members. It is not only a social but also an economic bliss to society, in as much as it determines the place of folk to work, and creates a fund of labourers which reproduces itself under normal conditions of social and economic adjustment. The caste has lost its divine power and has become a stereotyped institution. The pressure of economic conditions in India, specially due to the enormous growth of landless workers and unspecified labourers, has compelled the people to consider caste as a means and not as an end to their economic destinies. The future is heavily pregnant with more drastic changes in the caste system which has shaped the life-history of the Indian people for more than twenty centuries. Caste has become a loose organisation, and at a time when India is passing through the ordeal of an Industrial Revolution, such changes in functions and freedom of economic action are but the signs of progress and development.

*Caste and Sources of Labour Supply:* Recruitment of labour in all agricultural operations and rural industrial pursuits has a direct and complementary relationship with caste-groups. In many cases not only do castes determine the nature of occupation, but different occupations give birth to various sub-castes hitherto unknown.

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<sup>12</sup>Census of India, 1931—Vol. I, Part I, p. 296.

<sup>13</sup>The Caste System of Northern India, Blunt, 1931, pp. 231-232.



## AGRICULTURAL LABOUR CONDITIONS IN NORTHERN INDIA

It is usual to find a number of castes in one village, although some one caste may predominate. When the majority in a village belong to one and the same caste, which is a common feature of most of the 'mazras' of big villages (mouzas), the problem of labour supply is not so intense. It is only when we come across those villages where communal solidarity has lost its force, and congeries of individuals have settled down as tenant cultivators and field labourers, that the problem presents a new attitude. As a rule each occupation is followed by one particular caste, but agricultural occupations have facilitated the temporary, as well as permanent, mixture of two or more castes.

The outstanding features of labour supply in agriculture are summarized below :—

- (1) Owner-cultivators and high class tenants generally belong to higher castes whose hereditary occupation has been cultivation—e.g. Brahmins, Rajputs, Thakurs, Kayasthas, Tagas, Saiyids, and Pathans.
- (2) Farm-hands are recruited both from high and low castes. Usually they belong to the caste of the employer. The majority of this class considers agriculture as its principal, though not hereditary, occupation—e.g., Kurmis, Vaishyas, Gujars, Ahirs, Jats, Sheikhs and Pathans.
- (3) Field workers are recruited mostly from lower castes which have agriculture as their subsidiary occupation—e.g., Julahas, Lodhs, Chamars, Kumhars, Telis, Khatiks, and Koris.
- (4) Landless floating hands are recruited from the lowest rung of the social ladder. They have no definitely prescribed means of livelihood. This class includes also the agricultural serfs who abound in northern India, and are drawn preferably from amongst the aboriginal and depressed castes. The high percentage of aboriginal, quasi-aboriginal, depressed and exterior castes, in certain parts of northern India is largely responsible for the growth of this landless class of unspecified labourers. They are recruited mainly from Doms, Dusadhs, Bhuiyas, Pahariyas, Dhimars, Ghatwars, Kols and Koris.

There is everywhere to be found a large number of female agricultural workers engaged in spheres of work which men cannot

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efficiently perform. In the U.P., higher castes have a smaller portion of female workers as they consider it derogatory to their social status to allow their women to work on fields. Lower castes, on the other hand, have more women and children workers which not only supplement the scanty income of the family, but, assist the higher castes in return for wages. In Chota Nagpur the Munda, Ho and Oraon women do most of the work on their own fields and hire their labour for public works and ordinary cooly work in the neighbouring towns.

The recruitment of working dependents and general labourers depends to a great extent on the nature of occupation. The working dependents (women and children) are relatively low among Barhais, Lohars, Sonars, etc., because women are not expected to follow these occupations. But the working dependents for Luniyas, Chammars, Pasis and Ahirs are high, because they are largely labouring classes without much land of their own for cultivation. Thus we find that the greater extent to which women and children assist in the support of the home is very apparent among the lower castes and tribes in all the parts of northern India.

There is no hard and fast rule for linking up castes with particular works in agriculture, industry or trade, because a number of castes have abandoned their hereditary occupations, or made them subsidiary by moving to the ranks of agricultural workers and petty cultivators. On the other hand, various factors have gone to make the hereditary occupation of several castes more prosperous than many others. Thus the Sonar, Baniya, or the Halwai has had less reason for deserting his hereditary calling, although he may not cling to it with the same rigidity. The Nai, Barhai, Teli, Julaha and Kumhar—all follow trades necessary in all stages of civilization. On the other hand, the Dhobi, the Bhangi and the Bhishti follow occupations which are not likely to attract people of other castes, and the absence of competition means absence of vertical mobility. Such castes are based on the village requirements, and the division of labour in a community is not much different from the English rural classes which remained embryonic and did not grow in to a social system.<sup>14</sup> Below are given the caste-groups which follow agriculture as their principal or subsidiary occupation and supply

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<sup>14</sup>Caste System of Northern India, Blunt, 1933.

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labour for particular agricultural operations. It will be noticed that the influx to agriculture is accounted for mostly by those castes whose hereditary occupations were less remunerative, or have become moribund during the past few decades.<sup>15</sup>

Land owners and Rent Receivers	Upper class owners and tenant cultiva- tors.	Lower Class Tenant cultivators.
Brahmins	Bhuinhars	Gadariyas
Thakurs	Golapurabs	Chamars
Rajputs	Kurmis	Kahars
Banias	Jats	Kalwars
Syeds	Gujars	Telis
Kayasthas	Ahirs	Pasis
Sheikhs	Kachchis	Koris
Tagas	Pathans	Bhars
Pathans	Bhats	Ahars
Sainthwars	Muraos	Bagbans
(Agriculture as hereditary occupation and principal source of earning.)		(Hereditary occupa- tions as subsidiary to agriculture)

### Purely or partially agricultural

It may be interesting to note that the bulk of farm-hands required for ploughing, irrigating, and marketing are drawn from the above three groups. But the field workers required for ordinary unskilful works are recruited from the lower class of village menials (see table below). These, as a rule, are landless labourers and often employed as agricultural serfs in certain backward parts of the U.P., Bihar and Orissa:—

<sup>15</sup>Caste and Credit in the Rural Area, Nehru, pp. 1-22.

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Village menials (upper class)	Village menials (lower class)
Barhai	Dom
Darzi	Pasi
Lohar	Kanjar
Bhunj	Chamar
Teli	Beria
Sonar	Guriya
Nai	Mallah
Kumhar	Gidhiya
Dhobi	Kol
Bania	Ghatwar
Halwai	Pahariya
Julaha	Kori
Rangrez	Bhuiya
Lonia	Munda
Kunjra	Oraon
Purely non-agricultural (Hereditary occupation as principal source of income)	Partially agricultural (Field workers and Labourers unspecified).

### Non-agricultural or partially agricultural

These days, since the hereditary functionaries of the village communities have been shorn of their privileges, most of the castes have lost their divine power. Agricultural operations, of whatever kind or degree, are performed by all castes irrespective of their status or pedigree. Moreover, owing to the appearance of cyclic and successive agricultural depressions, which cause widespread distress, and unrest among the poorer cultivators, the rigidity of caste and occupational restrictions are fast losing ground. A large number of high caste cultivators who have lost their hereditary land and become landless labourers now perform all those services which were

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hitherto earmarked only for the low caste workers. Agricultural labourers, therefore, are recruited from amongst the Doms as well as the Brahmins, as will be seen from the following table:—

Ordinary Field Labourers	
High Caste	Low Caste
Brahmin	Chamar
Thakur	Dusadh
Ahir	Kahar
Pathan	Dhimar
Bhat	Guriya
Kurmi	Kori
Jat	Pasi

Thus it will be seen that agriculture is followed by all castes and classes of people. Agricultural labourers are recruited from all castes, high or low, agricultural or industrial, and no caste can be judged from the occupation it follows. This tendency is not common to agriculture alone, but also to urban industries, where the narrow conception of division of labour has become obsolete. In the light of modern conditions, and the uplift of the *harijan* and exterior castes, the link between caste and occupation is soon breaking down.

## CHAPTER IV.

### WOMEN AS AGRICULTURAL LABOURERS.

*Woman in Agriculture:* Woman has played a very important role in the agricultural life of India. Besides her domestic duties, as the mother of children and the servant of the family, she has taken an active part in assisting her husband in outdoor work such as sowing the seed, nursing the plants, collecting the harvest, and marketing the produce. In times of economic need and precarious financial conditions of the family, she has hired out her labour on the farms of other cultivators to supplement the family income. Since the tendency has become strong for agricultural male labourers to move to urban districts and thereby diminish the necessary supply, work has suffered on the fields and the agricultural industry deteriorated. In such contingencies and periods of need, in spite of a deficiency in physical strength and proportionately unremunerative wages, women labourers have filled the depleted ranks of the working folk, and have thus saved the agrarian situation in India.

*Comparative Efficiency:* It is a general assumption that women are inferior to men in all respects. But the quantity and quality of the woman labourer's output in the agricultural industry are certainly not lower than those of men. The main class of occupations in which women are advantageously employed are semi-skilled works, requiring a short period of training and a certain degree of fineness, dexterity and responsibility. Woman by nature is bestowed with these qualities, and certain agricultural operations such as weeding, husking, bundling, gathering and reaping, have safely fallen to her lot.

In the rice tracts of sub-montane Oudh, north Bihar, and eastern Bengal, women and children have proved first rate workers, and among the market gardeners (Kachhis, Muraos and Bagbans), women have displayed greater skill and efficiency than men in marketing the produce and transplanting operations. In most of the districts of northern India woman labour has become not only customary but also essential for certain field operations. In the Punjab the hill-women of Rathi, Kanet, Dagi and Koli castes seem to be real Amazons, and among the plain-dwellers the Meo women of

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Gurgaon have an equal share in the men's work in large numbers. The Ahir and Brahmin women of south-east Punjab are also very hard working because Brahmins here, are not priests but agriculturists. The Chulra, Jhinwar, Chamar and Sansi women among the lower castes have become proverbial in outdoor agricultural work as distinguished from domestic duties.<sup>1</sup> In Kumaon there is no difference in the work of the male and female, and it has been observed that, besides ploughing and marketing, all the work on the fields is performed by women folk.

In many parts of northern India female agricultural labourers do not have the supposed feeble physical standard. In the semi-primitive regions of Chota Nagpur, in the districts of the lower Himalayas, and in the northern and north-western districts of the Punjab, women present a picture of health and strength that cannot be rivalled by their confreres in non-agricultural industries. During recent famines in Chota Nagpur, it was found that women did the share of digging quite as well as the men, and in Chaibasa and Ranchi women dragging heavy rollers to pave the public roads, working at pulleys in the sinking of wells, preparing the fields for sowing, lifting water for irrigation, and doing a number of other works, which require masculine strength and energy, are common sights.<sup>2</sup> In Singhbhum the Ho women do all the agricultural work, while the men are indolent and lazy. The Ho, the Munda and the Oraon women are always seen toiling in the fields, and, it is they, who largely contribute to the support of the family.<sup>3</sup>

In the submontane districts of Oudh, which are subject to constant emigration of male labour to the industrial areas, it is the women who support the family by their earnings. Almost all the masculine work in the forests, public works construction, and the fields, is shared by these stalwart daughters of the country. Some operations like ploughing and marketing, which have hitherto been considered tabooed for female workers, have also fallen to their lot.<sup>4</sup>

*Proportion of Female to Male Workers:* The proportion of sexes engaged in agriculture is always changing from year to year. The ratio of female workers to non-working dependents in

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<sup>1</sup>Punjab Census Report, 1931, Part I, P. 233.

<sup>2</sup>Bihar and Orissa Census Report, Part I, 1931, pp. 190-195 B. & O. District Gazetteer, Hazaribagh, pp. 120-129.

<sup>3</sup>Settlement Report, Government Kolhan Estate (Singhbhum), A. D. Tuckey, p. 8.

<sup>4</sup>"Agricultural Labour and Market Gardening in Oudh", Lorenzo, A. M. pp. 138-139.

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pasture and agriculture was 47 workers to 53 dependents in 1911, 46:54 in 1921 and 44:56 in 1931. These figures indicate that the number of female workers has been on a continual decrease. That this is due in part to a predilection for returning total instead of working dependents, is possibly indicated by the figures for sexes engaged in agriculture, in which the number of males returned as workers has increased by nearly two millions, while the number of females has decreased by nearly five millions so far as to reduce the total number of agricultural workers to less than the total in 1921.<sup>5</sup> The quite exceptional increase in females under domestic service shows at once, however, where the bulk of these workers appears.

In the United Provinces the number per mille of female earners and working dependents engaged in pasture and agriculture was 711, 784 and 754 in 1911, 1921 and 1931 respectively. An exceptionally high increase in 1921 is due to the rise in the cost of living and heavy mortality caused by the influenza epidemic. These two factors necessitated every available woman lending a hand in the fields. In the same way, now, on the return to more normal conditions, it is the falling off in female agricultural workers that is responsible for almost the whole decrease.<sup>6</sup> From the definition of working dependents, it is natural to find that the bulk of them are female. In the U.P. in all occupations there are 5 female working dependents to every male working dependent, and the highest proportion is in agriculture where the figure exceeds 6 in ordinary cultivation. Moreover, the vast majority of working dependents is found in agriculture, which is almost invariably a family occupation and in which women and children must necessarily assist.

Taking all occupations together, there are 465 females per mille male workers. This proportion varies with provinces—e.g. Punjab 115, United Provinces 423, Bihar and Orissa 411. The proportions for ordinary cultivation are still lower, being 393 for India, and 195, 423 and 387 for these provinces respectively. The number of female workers per 1000 male workers in agricultural pursuits was as follows in 1931.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>Census of India 1931, Vol. I, Part I, p. 274.

<sup>6</sup>Census of U.P.—1931, Part I, p. 410.

<sup>7</sup>Table compiled from the Census Reports of 1931.



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	<i>India</i>	<i>Punjab</i>	<i>U.P.</i>	<i>Bihar &amp; Orissa.</i>
Rent Receivers	346	297	317	154
Cultivating Owners	202	110	449	131
Tenant Cultivators	271	324	343	283
Agricultural Labourers	840	113	823	745
Labourers Unspecified	832	100	564	798
Domestic Service	4203	177	627	939

These figures indicate that of all provinces in the north, Punjab stands out prosperous in having the least number of female agricultural labourers and unspecified workers who constitute the landless class. On the other hand, the position of the United Provinces and Bihar is not very favourable. To a certain extent the non-participation of female workers in agriculture stands out as an index to the prosperity of the family, where woman is not required to supplement the family budget, or perhaps, it is regarded as much more socially respectable for a wife to be engaged at home in household duties than to labour in the fields, on account of the general tendency for castes aspiring for a higher social standing to keep their women at home. But there are certain tasks, in association with agriculture, which seem to fall naturally to a woman's lot, and where male workers are easily outnumbered:—<sup>8</sup>

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	<i>India</i>	<i>Punjab</i>	<i>U.P.</i>	<i>Bihar &amp; Orissa</i>
1. Rice pounding, husking and flour grinding	4420	1455	13,735	8,610
2. Rope, twine and string making	1704	318	1,173	3,121
3. Grain parching	1674	1145	1,133	2,250
4. Trade in fodder	1527	426	1,395	1,818
5. Collecting and selling fuel	1260	242	1,173	2,616
6. Dairying and poultry-farming	1059	426	1,115	1,448
7. Basket making	983	267	628	1,117
8. Lac collecting	657	—	170,500	—

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<sup>8</sup>Females per 1000 male workers (Table compiled from Provincial Census Reports of 1931).

## WOMEN AS AGRICULTURAL LABOURERS

If a comparison is made with the proportion of female workers in cultivation or all occupations combined, it will be found that women undoubtedly contribute a large share to the family income through these subsidiary sources. The Census Superintendents have always been struck with the difficulty of distinguishing the economic work of women from unproductive household duties. Failing this, the proportion of dependents to workers is always returned high, hence an under-statement of facts. If these services are also taken subsidiary to cultivation, the proportion of female workers per mille male workers would be considerably increased.

In almost all the parts of India flour grinding, husking, rice pounding, and collection of forest produce, has become the monopoly of women. Rope and twine making, basket and mattress weaving, and lac collecting, have always attracted women more than men. In the United Provinces, the collection and sale of firewood, grass, reeds, cowdung, etc., was exclusively a woman's work. Now, though more women than men have taken up selling fodder for animals, more females than males have given up selling fuel, cowdung, etc.<sup>9</sup> In Chota Nagpur, there are very few agriculturists who do not combine the cultivation and collection of lac with ordinary cultivation. This is done entirely by women. In the United Provinces also womenfolk have brought prosperity to their families only through this industry. In Bengal silviculture and sericulture have given employment to a number of women in association with agriculture and their proportion per mille male workers exceeds more than 150 per cent. In the U.P. female general-labourers have decreased from 321,236 in 1911 to 209,225, in 1931, due to the fact that most of these were engaged in the above-mentioned industries. The number of workers in some of these industries during 1911-31 increased 700 per cent. in rice pounding and flour-grinding, 50 per cent in collection of forest produce and dealing in fodder for animals. The proportion of females to males is naturally much higher among working dependents than it is among earners, either in principal or subsidiary occupations. In subsidiary occupations alone, there were in India in 1931, in every 1000 earners, only 239 females to 761 males, while if domestic service be excluded, the figures for females fall to 154. Among earners in principal occupations, the number of females is 222 and in working dependents 733 to 267 males. The proportion of actual female workers has likewise fallen heavily. We may safely assume that the proportion of females to male workers in agriculture has been considerably decreased owing to the women

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<sup>9</sup>Census Report, U.P. 1931, Part I, Para 32, p. 413.

## AGRICULTURAL LABOUR CONDITIONS IN NORTHERN INDIA

returning as non-working dependents when they should have been classed as working dependents engaged in various domestic duties. The decrease in the number of actual workers in cultivation is also due to women following industries subsidiary to agriculture.

*Recruitment of Female Workers:* The high proportion of female earners in agriculture is found chiefly among the low castes, because it is considered derogatory for higher castes to allow their women to work out on the fields. Since there is a general growing tendency for castes to aspire to a higher level, by abandoning their hereditary occupations and taking to agriculture, it is certainly regarded as much more respectable to keep their women at home engaged in household duties than to labour in the fields. In the U.P. three-quarters of the female workers are engaged in pasture-work and agriculture, industry employs one-eighth, trade one-twentieth, and for the rest they are chiefly domestic servants and general labourers.<sup>10</sup> Since 1911 there has been a marked decrease in the sex ratio at all ages in the higher castes, and therefore the sex ratio in female earners and working dependents shows a decline among Bhuinhars and Muslim agricultural castes. But for Brahmans, Rajputs, Jats, Tagas, Khatiks and Gujars, the sex ratio of female workers and working dependents has increased, which shows that women folk are gradually taking a larger share in augmenting the family income.

The number of female workers, recruited from agricultural castes only, in the United Provinces is as follows:—<sup>11</sup>

Low Castes	No. per mille of male workers.	High Castes	No. per mille of male workers.
Saharia	860	Taga	46
Gidhiya	755	Jat	51
Kanjar	598	Rajput	68
Chamar	529	Bhuinhar	84
Kahar	421	Brahman	88
Pasi	406	Gujar	90
Kori	396	Saiyad	102
Julaha	248	Pathan	104

<sup>10</sup>Census Report, U.P.—Part I, 1931, p. 233.

<sup>11</sup>Census of U.P., 1931, Part I, p. 406.

## WOMEN AS AGRICULTURAL LABOURERS

In the Punjab some typical high and low caste proportions of female earners per mille male workers were as follows:—<sup>12</sup>

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Rathi	796	Sheikh	62
Kanet	748	Kamboh	64
Meo	652	Arain	72
Dagi	799	Pathan	75
Ahir	428	Jat	121

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The low caste women outnumber the high caste in the work on fields. The Chuhra (362), Sansi (308), Jhinwar (276) and Chamar (271) women also assist in out-door work as distinguished from domestic service. But among the high castes, owing to the purdah system and in many cases better economic conditions, the number of female agricultural workers is comparatively low. Among the higher agricultural castes, therefore, the females not only do not work as field workers on others' fields, they take very little share in the work of their husbands on their own fields.

The recruitment of female labourers also depends to a large extent on their age-groups. Female children under 13 years, newly married women, and those up to 25 years of age do not often hire their labour on others' fields, but assist their own family workers. It is generally the grown-up and elderly women who are free from various taboos and social restrictions and allowed to work at will. But among very poor classes, where the husband is incapacitated, under-employed or unemployed, even young girls are driven outdoors to seek full-time employment and support the house. In other circumstances, women of tender ages go out to work as agricultural labourers in the event of their husbands' death, and since they cannot be re-married, they have to depend on the earnings of their own labour.

The employment of woman labour in some districts of northern India depends on the economic conditions of the labouring classes. Unlike the western countries women in India do not offer themselves for employment merely to avoid the tedium of home, helping mother sweep, wash dishes, darn clothes, or to secure the social companionship of the labouring people and also a certain amount of independence. Here, the western tedium of home is an essential part of

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<sup>12</sup>Punjab Census Report 1931, Part I, p. 233.

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Indian women's training, which must be performed by young girls with an unquestioning obedience, no matter whether they be employed on the fields or remain unoccupied at home. In these districts if women have at all offered their services as field labourers, it is due to the necessity of earning a living for themselves or for supporting a family, or for supplementing their husbands' or fathers' income. In case there is no demand on the fields during the slack season, these women become grass-cutters, fuel and cow-dung collectors, and soon after the first rains they are absorbed in the fields for sowing, weeding and transplanting *sathi* rice. In spite of economic necessity there are various classes of women who are detained at home and not allowed to work as outdoor labourers—viz., high class Muslim women subject to the rigid purdah system, women of big cultivators' families, and women occupied in subsidiary industries which are carried on partially with agriculture. Such cases are not common but limited to particular families or castes. However, an interesting enquiry was made in village Sheikhdhir, District Bahraich, U.P., to ascertain the extent to which female workers are compelled to work under economic pressure, and it was found that more than ninety-six per cent. of female labourers were employed to supplement household income:—<sup>13</sup>

Economic need of the worker	Total number found working	Percentage
Supplementing household income	26	48.15
Supporting themselves and dependents	18	33.33
Supporting personally only	8	14.82
Love of money	2	3.70

*Supply of Female Labourers:* The total supply of female agricultural labourers at present in India is about 26 millions. In the U.P. it is a little over 5 millions and in Bihar and Orissa nearly 4 millions, but in the Punjab and Bengal it is about one million and 566,000 respectively. If only the number of field workers is taken into account, the figures come to 14¼ millions for India; 1¾ millions for Bihar and Orissa, 1½ millions for the U.P., 280,000 for

<sup>13</sup>Lorenzo, A. M., *Agricultural Labour and Market Gardening in Oudh—1932*, p. 77.

## WOMEN AS AGRICULTURAL LABOURERS

the Punjab, and 257,000 for Bengal. If we include in this class the number of unspecified female workers, the total would range between 29 and 30 millions. The unspecified class of labourers constitutes an important feature in agriculture and since all casual labour is drawn from this fund of workers, it is but necessary to allot a fair place to it. This number of female agricultural workers is never stationary but fluctuates from season to season and is represented in various groups of farm workers, working dependents, or domestic servants. In the U.P., agriculture taken as a whole, female agriculturists have decreased by over a million since 1921. Female tenants account for 59 per cent., agricultural labourers for 29 per cent. and landlords for 11 per cent. Female owner-cultivators have increased by 1205 per cent. since 1911, and agricultural labourers by 13.8 per cent., but cultivating tenants have decreased by 17.6 per cent. The enormous increase of female landlords is only the result of the difference in classification of the Kaikars of Kumaon, and of those holding direct from His Highness the Maharaja of Tehri Garhwal State.<sup>14</sup> This has also affected the number of tenants. Eliminating this difference we would find an increase in the number of non-cultivating landlords, but a decrease in cultivating owners. This is the outcome of high prices of agricultural produce and good seasons, which have enabled tenants to extend their holdings, and the cultivating landlords have found that they could get good rents by subletting the land they were cultivating themselves. It will be seen that the increase in non-cultivating landlords has undoubtedly increased the number of agricultural labourers. But the continuous fall in agricultural prices at the close of the decade without any decrease in recorded rents compelled many tenants to abandon cultivation. Thus, while on the one hand, the increase in the number of landlords in the first half of the decade was at the expense of prosperous tenants; the increase, on the other hand, in the number of agricultural workers in the second half of the decade, was due to the retirement of marginal tenant cultivators.

The conspicuous fluctuations in the number of agricultural labourers, it will be noticed, are to a considerable degree correlated with the movement of agricultural prices. The employment of female workers in the fields, subsidiary agricultural industries, and even in urban industries, depends upon the prosperity or otherwise of the family in any particular year; the same rule applies to the employment of child labour in these occupations. Thus it has been observ-

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<sup>14</sup>Census of U.P.—Part I, 1931, p. 411 (also para 14 supra).

## AGRICULTURAL LABOUR CONDITIONS IN NORTHERN INDIA

ed that women devote themselves to household and domestic duties if favourable agricultural conditions and good prices bring sufficient income to the family. But with every downward trend in prices, the number of female agricultural workers increases side by side to make good the loss of family income caused by a fall in prices.

Corroborating the data under review, we find that there are certain tendencies in operation which to a great extent control and regulate the supply of woman labour in agriculture:

- (a) Women are occupied in the simpler and lighter forms of employment. In agriculture they neither dig nor plough, but much of their work is carrying-work.
- (b) Women workers form a valuable supplement in agriculture, and the number can be swelled in times of necessity very considerably, to shrink again when the need is past.
- (c) Women seldom migrate long distances to seek employment in organised urban industries, but prefer to take up what little work they can in their own villages. Industrial life has little or no attraction for them.
- (d) There is no tendency for females to usurp the work of males, a tendency so insistent in western countries. Nor is there any likelihood of such a development for some time to come. The vast majority are married and married young. They have their domestic duties to perform, and their work has to be done at home or near by. Their general lack of education excludes them from engaging in any but the simplest forms of labour.

*Women's Efficiency Wages:* There is a definite social and religious convention against girls and women who have left, or leave their family circle. Not only does the society control the supply of woman labour, but the individual sense of duty and responsibility among our Indian maidens has made them to stick to the locality where, regardless of their own employment, their father, brother or husband, can find employment. Therefore, they do not move to places where there is a likelihood of their being employed on higher wages and under better conditions. Further, the rigidity of communal organization and occupational division of labour is so great here, that women doing one sort of work (weeding) would not move to the other (grinding) which is considered to be of a lower social class. In other cases, the range of ages determines the nature of

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agricultural operations on the fields. Smaller girls can do each and every kind of work within their capacity, but young women 'taboo' certain services and do only light, unskilled or semi-skilled work, while the elderly women are employed for works which require previous experience, dexterity, and a certain amount of responsibility. In certain cases social restrictions are so severe that women would have to be in very dire distress before they moved into a downward and lower occupational class, however high the inducement. Thus not only are the avenues of higher remuneration blocked by the social organization of the agricultural labourers, but women's efficiency wages are much lower than those of the male labourers. In almost all parts of India, the rates of wages of female workers range from twenty-five to fifty per cent lower than those of male labourers, a price below that which equilibrium between supply and demand would fix in the price-fixing process. The following table shows the average rate of wages prevailing in Oudh and the proportion of women's wages in relation to men's:—<sup>15</sup>

Kind of Labour (1)	Wages of male Workers (2)	Wages of Female Workers (3)	Percentage of column (3) to (2). (4)
	Rs. a.p.	Rs. a. p.	
Ordinary field labour	0-4-6	0-3-6	77.3
Casual labour	0-6-0	0-3-6	58.3
Skilled labour	0-8-0	0-4-6	56.2
Total	1-2-6	0-11-6	
Average wage:	0-6-3	0-3-9	60%

These lower rates of wages should not be taken as an index to the overcrowding of women field workers in the agricultural industry resulting in low wages, there being little further work where women could be occupied by some subsidiary industries. Whatever the supply of woman labour is, and has been, we must rest assured that

<sup>15</sup>Lorenzo, Op. Cit. p. 50.



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there has been a marked scarcity of field labourers all over the land—yet, it did not raise women's wages.

When it is said that it is unjust to pay female labour less than the male, it is not clear why the employer who compels both kinds of labour together does not increasingly substitute the cheaper female labour for the dearer male labour. If the employer does not do this, he puts a higher value on the male labour for some reason or the other, in spite of the supposed equal work. What is that "higher value" that goes in favour of the male labour? Is it prestige and superiority of the male, or the customary and traditional regulations? It will be interesting to note that the following causes are responsible for the lower wages of women workers:—

- (1) Biological inferiority of the female and developed sense of subordination owing to the infusion of Hindu religious literature and the survival of ancient social ideas.
- (2) Prevalence of customary wages.
- (3) Social restrictions on the mobility of woman labour, caste organization and occupational division of labour.
- (4) Casual and part-time work on the field is well handled by women after their household duties, and they are willing to work even on low wages to utilise their leisure.
- (5) Complete absence of subsidiary occupations to fall back upon in times of distress, compels the women-folk to take up what work there is to make both ends meet. Thus without having any regard for the consequences where the whole system of wage-rate would be affected, these anxious workers injure the position of the entire class and bring about an all-round decline in the prevailing rates.

For certain agricultural operations, however, where women workers have assumed superiority over male workers, e.g. weeding, sowing, grinding and transplanting, wages are fairly high, though they still do not reach the average rate for male labourers. It seems, therefore, that women are preferred to men, not because of their comparatively greater efficiency but because of the lower wages they demand. A big Zamindar (*khudkasht*) of Oudh says, "we

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have tried workers of both sexes on similar jobs, and making a general comparison of the results, we should say that women equal men in every way, excepting for heavy labour, in the matter of efficiency, while in every case their employment has effected an economy for us in the wages paid". But even such work in which women have a monopoly is either seasonal or casual, and can give no permanent employment to them. The rates of wages for works where woman labour is preferred are as follows:—

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Kind of work	Wages	Available Employment (in the year)
Sowing	0-1-6 to 0-2-6	35 days
Weeding	0-2-0 to 0-3-6	40 days
Transplanting	0-2-0 to 0-3-0	20 days
Reaping	0-2-0 to 0-2-6	30 days
Miscellaneous	0-1-6 to 0-2-0	60 days

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## CHAPTER V.

### CHILDREN AS AGRICULTURAL WORKERS.

*Participation of Children in Agriculture:* The rural family, rather than the individual, is still the unit of economic production. The children are not only considered valuable economic assets, but their services are *par excellence* more important in collaboration with other family hands. There are certain agricultural operations—such as weeding, husking, spreading manure, watching crops, carting, etc., where the services of children cannot be dispensed with. Similarly, in the subsidiary cottage industries, it becomes a pleasant duty of hardworking and obedient children to assist their parents and lighten their burden. Thus the Ahir boy devotes much of his time in herding cattle, the Teli boy drives the *kolhu*, Guriya boy helps in fishing by preparing the bait and collecting the catch, and the Murao youngster is of great assistance in marketing fruits and vegetables.

The necessity of child labour usually arises from the fact that adult labour is scarce, or is not forthcoming in times of heavy work due to unremunerative wages. But in those districts where a considerable number of floating hands is available at the slightest call, child labour is negligible. On the other hand, wherever the peasantry is poor and maintained by small holdings, the family land is always attended to by women and children in all stages of cultivation.

The majority of children engaged in agriculture are returned as non-working dependents. Only a very small number can be classified under actual workers. During the past decades the number of non-working dependents has increased owing to the difficulty of getting employment and earning an independent livelihood. The detention of children at home has not only decreased the family income, but has increased the burden of support on the earning adult male-member of the family.

*Size of Agricultural Families and Supply of Child Labour:* The general average size of family in all occupations in India is about 4.3 and the number of children surviving is 2.9 (70 per cent.) of

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the four born alive. On this basis the average size of family in India will consist of  $3\frac{1}{2}$  adults, i.e., two adults and three children (non working dependents). But the size in agricultural occupations is above the general average, and the proportion of total children surviving per 1000 born is also remarkably large.<sup>1</sup>

	Average number of children (born)	Proportion of total surviving per mille born.
1. Cultivating owners	4.4	666
2. Agricultural Labourers	4.3	702
3. Cultivation	4.2	695
4. Industry, Trade and Transport	4.2	689
5. Public Administration and Liberal Arts	4.0	716
6. Miscellaneous	4.1	694

Since most of the infantile mortality in rural areas occurs within the first year of the child's birth, the survival rate of children between 1-15 years is much higher in rural than in urban areas. In the United Provinces the proportion of children under 15 is considerably smaller in cities than in the provinces as a whole, owing to the proportionate excess in rural areas.<sup>2</sup> Similarly in Chota Nagpur the number of children of this age is so large, not because more of them are born, but because fewer die.<sup>3</sup> The raising of the marriage age by legislative measures will not reduce the number of children but will increase the proportion of those surviving. These two tendencies, i.e., the natural increase and the greater survival value of children of working ages, are sufficient proofs of a large juvenile population in rural areas which has steadily increased unhampered by any economic or physical calamities during the last decade. On the other hand, since the children of urban parents, generally well-to-do, have facilities of schooling denied to the majority of villagers, the need of child-employment does not arise with them for a sufficiently long time. But the prime necessity before the villagers is to seek for their children, of between 5—13 years of age, some suitable

<sup>1</sup>Census of India, Part I, 1931, p. 206.

<sup>2</sup>Census of U.P., 1931, p. 224.

<sup>3</sup>Census of Bihar and Orissa, Part I, 1931, p. 123.

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employment—firstly, to avoid sitting idle at home, and secondly, to supplement the family income. Particularly in the case of the field workers and unspecified agricultural labourers, the larger number of children is considered profitable, because it is in this class that the workers verge on the level of starvation without the contribution of women and children to the family income.

The size of the families in agriculture differs considerably with the caste-groups which follow different agricultural operations. The Bhil cultivators in the C.P. have an average family of only 2.5 children, and the semi-primitive nomadic tribes of Kumaon and Chota Nagpur, which practise 'Jhum' cultivation, have an average family of only 3.3 children with very low survival rates i.e. 651 and 431 per mille respectively. This is due to their peripatetic economic life and low standard of living. The Chamars on the other hand, have the largest size of family (5.6) followed by Brahmans (5.2) and Rajputs (4.8). If the duration of marriage is correlated with the caste of the family, we would find that the Kurmis (which are purely an agricultural caste) have the highest number of surviving children during the life-time of the parents—i.e., 4.5 against 3.9 for all the castes in India.<sup>4</sup> As a rule, the percentage of children among the higher castes is notably low, and the percentage increases as we proceed downwards in the caste scale. In the United Provinces the number per mille of children in the age group 0—13 is given below:<sup>5</sup>

Brahman	642	Julaha	774
Rajput	651	Chamar	755
Bhuinhar	669	Pasi	755
Kurmi	681	Dom	731
Moghal	683	Ahir	722

This tendency is likewise apparent in other provinces of northern India. In Bihar and Orissa the Rajputs and Babhans have a relatively lower number of children, and a higher proportion of elderly people, than the lower castes such as Chamars, Musahars, Goalas, Koris, etc.<sup>6</sup> In the Punjab the number of children below 13, in various agricultural castes in 1931 shows the same results.

<sup>4</sup>Census of India, 1931, Vol. I, statement V, p. 209.

<sup>5</sup>Punjab Census Report, Part I, 1931, p. 225.

<sup>6</sup>Bihar and Orissa Census Report, 1931, Part I, p. 125.

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The distribution of children of agricultural castes of both sexes aged 0—13 in the Punjab was as follows:—<sup>7</sup>

	(number per mille)	
Kanet	630	Harni 975
Brahman	668	Bawaria 868
Rajput	645	Sansi 826
Jat	692	Chuhra 817
Saiyad	721	Arain 806
Pathan	729	Chamar 769

In 1931 there were in India 128,465,421 children (of both sexes) below 13½ years of age, or 37 per cent. of the total population.<sup>8</sup> During 1921-31 the number of children in the age group of 0—5 increased by +35 per cent. and by +14.5 per cent. in the age group of 0—10. This increase was due to agricultural prosperity and better economic condition of the rural population. Since no satisfactory work can be performed in agriculture by children below the age of ten, most of the child labour is recruited from ages between 10—15, which shows an increase of +10.6 per cent. during 1921-31,<sup>9</sup> and is the best index to the percentage increase of child-workers in the various provinces of northern India. The total strength of child workers in this class at present in India approximates 160,000,000. The growing supply of child workers in the age group of 10—15 can be noticed from the following figures:—

	(1901-11)	(1911-21)	(1921-31)
Punjab <sup>10</sup>	—6.2	+10.3	+17.1
United Provinces <sup>11</sup>	—4.1	— 3.7	+ 7.2
Bihar and Orissa <sup>12</sup>	+4.6	+ 4.9	+ 8.2
Bengal <sup>13</sup>	+5.8	+ 8.3	+10.7

These figures are sufficient to show the remarkable increase of child workers of ages between 10 and 15 years, a tendency noticeable in almost all the Provinces, States and Agencies of India. Some

<sup>7</sup>Punjab Census Report—Part I, 1931, p. 136.

<sup>8</sup>Census of India—Part I, Vol. I, 1931, p. 89.

<sup>9</sup>Census of India, 1931, (Sub. Table VI), Vol. I, Part I, p. 102.

<sup>10</sup>Punjab Census Report, Part I, 1931, (Sub-Table VI), p. 143.

<sup>11</sup>U.P. Census Report, Part I, 1931, (Sub-Table VI), p. 256.

<sup>12</sup>Bihar and Orissa Census Report, Part I, 1931, (Sub-Table III), p. 133.

<sup>13</sup>Bengal Census Report, Part I, 1931, (Sub-Table VI) p. 153.

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striking characteristics of this growth of juvenile population are: *firstly*, that there is a systematic increase of this population since 1901; *secondly*, that most of the increase in the population of children is found in rural rather than urban areas; and *lastly*, that almost all of this population in rural areas is available for employment in cultivation, industry or transport.

But the unfortunate circumstance lies in the fact that while, on the one hand, the population of children of working ages is increasing in all parts of India, on the other hand, there has set in a ruinous agricultural depression blocking all avenues of employment for this dependent population. The child, therefore, in an agricultural family is becoming a liability draining away the scanty resources of the family. This growing child population has also become an economic menace and is to a large extent responsible for the sinking standard of living among the rural classes. The burden of maintaining a large number of non-working dependents falls most crushingly upon the weaker shoulders of the lower castes, and in the long run accounts for a general drift of the surplus rural population to urban areas.

It can, therefore, safely be concluded that a large amount of labour power is wasting in rural areas. The agricultural industry of India has great possibilities for expansion where this surplus labour power can be productively employed. This expansion should be primarily in cottage industries ancillary to agriculture, because child labour cannot be efficiently employed in outdoor field work. Moreover, children can do better work under family supervision, earn comparatively larger incomes, and acquire training in skilful work. It is really a deplorable feature of Indian agriculture to allow child labour to remain unemployed or underemployed when it can contribute a much larger share towards the national wealth.

*Exploitation of Child Labour:* The conditions under which children work on the farms are frequently injurious. In the case of hired child labour the work is tedious and the day long. During the second half of *Asarh* and *Bhadon*, an adult works on the field from 5 A.M. to 10 P.M. with an hour's rest in the afternoon. Children have been found to labour from six in the morning till late in the evening, and in moon-lit-nights, work is resumed after dinner and continues till midnight. In Gonda and Bahraich (Oudh), a boy works on the field for 10 hours at one anna per day without the afternoon food allowance. In Chota Nagpur women and children work for more than 12 hours for one anna or one anna

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and six pies with the afternoon meal consisting of parched grams but with very little afternoon leisure. In Gorakhpore and Jaunpore the working day for a child of 9-13 years of age is from 10 to 14 hours during the sowing, watering or reaping seasons, and instances are not rare where even the day's leisure has to be forgone. The hours of work are usually adjusted to summer and winter conditions, but are seldom less than twelve, excluding the off-time.

Our investigations in the eastern and sub-montane districts of the U.P. have brought to light numerous cases where in addition to excessively long hours of work, the conditions of work have been most unhygienic. During the rainy season continuous work in flooded fields (while sowing and transplanting the Sathi rice) often results in swollen fingers and toes, boils, itches, and other skin diseases which cause much suffering.<sup>14</sup> As is only to be expected from the low-lying position of these districts and large areas of forests and *tarai* lands, malarial fever is responsible for by far the greatest number of deaths among children of working ages. The rate of mortality varies from year to year and is most severe in seasons of heavy rainfall. The poverty of the rural families, the absence of adequate medical aid, and the ignorance of parents, combine to increase the incidence of child mortality which ultimately diminishes the national fund of agricultural labour.

It cannot be doubted that many children on the fields are doing work not suited to their age and strength, and cases have been found of bodily injuries received by hard work in early ages. Due to the early labour period in the case of young children, and absence of adequate protection and sufficient and wholesome nourishment, their mental and physical growth is very much retarded. So long as the parents utilize their children's labour on their own fields there is no fear of exploitation, but no sooner does a child move on to a neighbour's field as a hireling, the administration of Child Labour Legislation becomes imperative. The employers often treat them harshly and put them to severe odd jobs without paying a fair remuneration. Such abuses are of constant occurrence, although the standards of judgment as to legitimate hours, wages and working conditions, vary so widely in different provinces and between different employers.

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<sup>14</sup>Lorenzo, A. M., 'Agricultural Labour and Market Gardening in Oudh,' 1932, pp. 54-56.



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**Rates of Wages:** The supply of child labour varies with seasons in different parts of India. The rates of wages, therefore, depend on the nature and amount of work done by children. During the months of December and January child labour is much in demand for harvesting and stripping of sugar-cane, for spreading *khoi*, and for serving as mates on harvest cane. During March and April they are needed for nipping tobacco buds, harvesting of crops, threshing, etc. During the watering season they are required to construct small drains, for cleaning the *nalis*, driving the bullocks, regulating the supply of water in the beds, and other such light odd jobs. The services of children are required in these operations, not because their work is skilful but because their labour is cheap. In most cases, only part-time work is offered, and wages are paid by piece-work.

The rates of wages in the case of children of working ages (say 10-15 years) are far below the rates for adult labourers. Whether in temporary or permanent employment, children as a rule, irrespective of the nature of work done, never get more than two annas a day. In Oudh the average rate does not exceed one anna, with one meal (usually of parched gram), for casual child labour. Three systems of payment are, however, prevalent in North India:—

(a) *Majuri*—This is generally a piece-work system of cash payment. In times of hard work on the fields cheap woman and child labour is in demand, and the wages for such casual work range between one and two annas (without the afternoon meal). The working hours are shorter and only light work is to be performed. While there has been a marked rise in the wages of adult male labourer, the rates of wages for child worker have remained the same. On an average a child earns one anna and three pies with one meal, but during the slack season child labour altogether loses its demand.

(b) *Khawai*—Under this system the employer undertakes to feed the child twice daily and to pay a sum of money not exceeding rupees two per month. The employer enters into a contract with the parents to send their children to work for a certain number of days, for the completion of a certain task or for a particular season. Sometimes payment is made in advance and the parent is bound down to ensure a regular supply of child labour. The usual duration of the working day is from 8 to 12 hours. The afternoon meal consists of 2 chataks of parched grain and  $\frac{1}{2}$  chatak of gur, but the evening meal is wholesome, consisting of bread and pulses. Nothing

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is served at the commencement of work in the morning. The child has the option of sleeping at the employer's house or with his parents.

(c) *Sewak-Bachcha*—In places where the Sewak system of labour contract is in vogue, the children of agricultural serfs are under obligation to perform any work that the master-employer requires them to do. In the eastern Ghagra tracts the *Sewak-Bachcha*, on attaining the age of ten, and sometimes even seven or eight, is obliged to work on the master's field. He is given food once a day, an allowance for clothing once in the year, but no cash. Under this system there does not exist any binding rate of wages, but the *Sewak-Bachcha* is contented with whatever dole the master may choose to give. The *Sewak-Bachcha* sleeps at his master's house and is obliged to be on duty all the twenty-four hours unless ill or incapacitated. In Chota Nagpur the children of Kamias have to work for their master even without food or wages. It is implied that the grain allowance made to the Kamia's family includes the youngster's share. Clothing, once in a year, is of course regarded as their legitimate right.

In the Punjab and the western districts of the U.P. child labour is now being considerably employed in cottage industries and by the village artisans. The Ahirs employ children for herding, cleaning the sheds, feeding the cattle, and for helping in the manufacture of milk products. Wages are paid in kind, usually four *panseris* (a measure of 5 seers) of grain at harvest time, a few annas at festivals, and a dhoti once in a while. In the U.P. Muraos and Kachchis employ them to work in vegetable gardens on a payment of one anna in cash and a small quantity of raw vegetables. In Bihar and Chota Nagpur, children are freely employed to collect stick-lac only on a dole of food. But on account of poor remunerations, absence of cash wages, and instability of employment, grown-up children have a tendency to move to the cities or mining centres where they are readily employed in carrying-work. These daily migrations of child labourers not only help them to earn cash and higher rates of wages, but they have a healthy influence on raising the rates of wages in the rural areas in general. Thus we find that *firstly*, the rate of wages for child workers are deplorably low and unstable; *secondly*, that child labour has seldom employment of a permanent nature; and *finally*, that child labour is mercilessly exploited by cruel employers in the absence of protective legislation.

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*Malnutrition of the Rural Child:* Allied to these grave disabilities to which child labour in India is subjected, is the all-important problem of food and nutrition. The health and development of children are more closely dependent on diet than on any other single environmental factor. The child in rural India, not only over-works under conditions most injurious to healthy living, but subsists on an ill-balanced and inadequate dietary which undermines his health and lowers down his efficiency. Usage and custom have tested the utility of foods and have accustomed particular people to particular dietaries, but the dire poverty of the masses compels them to deviate from the tested path which leads them to malnutrition and contributes to a slackening of growth and efficiency and a shortening of the span of life.<sup>15</sup> Since individual and national efficiency always depend upon the health and strength of the growing generation, the problem of dietary should have an important place in any campaign for Rural Reconstruction.

Truly speaking, the problem of nutrition begins with the welfare of the infant and the diet of the mother during pregnancy and lactation. In western countries infants are reared very successfully by artificial feeding on "humanized" dried milks supplemented by fruit juice to provide vitamin 'C'. They are usually weaned at the age of 6-9 months and put on a diet of which cow's milk forms the more important ingredient. But for the poorer classes of India, artificial feeding is both expensive and unknown, and even cow's milk cannot be procured. Therefore, breast feeding is prolonged till a child is two or three years old. But the quality of milk provided by a mother is to a considerable extent dependent on her own diet. If her diet be deficient in vitamins, her milk will be deficient in vitamins. She cannot give out what she has not received. Unfortunately the diet of mothers in the villages, as a rule, is very poor, and therefore infantile beri-beri occurs in breast-fed children whose mother's diet is deficient in vitamin B1. Infantile beri-beri has proved to be a rapidly fatal disease in rural areas, because the deficiency of Vitamin B1 cannot be supplied by other sources.<sup>16</sup>

Where a child passes from a diet of breast-milk to one of rice and *dal*, is a point where infant welfare presents formidable difficulties. Poor feeding at this age results in a rapid deterioration in the condition of the infant. If systematic investigations be car-

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<sup>15</sup>Food Survey of Principal castes in Baroda State, Antia and Kale, Census of Baroda, Chap. VIII, Appendix V, p. 299.

<sup>16</sup>Children's Diet, The "Leader", May 5, 1936.

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ried out in rural areas, it will be found that the average state of nutrition during the growth period is very low, and therefore the incidence of deficiency diseases high among the child-population. McCarrison demonstrated that the death-dealing diseases prevailing in India, and taking a heavy toll of child life, have a malnutritional element in their genesis and course.<sup>17</sup> Aykroyd maintains that obvious deficiency diseases are associated with retarded growth and development in almost all parts of India.<sup>18</sup> The children of pre-school age (4-6 years) do not get any special diet beyond what their parents eat. It is usually *dal* and rice with occasional dishes of curd and vegetables, and cheap fruits only in the season. In many families meals are taken once a day and children are never served milk or ghee. Therefore, the pre-school child, like the infant, suffers incalculable harm due to defective and insufficient nutrition.

The school entrants in the Rural Primary Schools at the age of 6 or 7 exhibit a great amount of physical impairment and defects, due in large measure to deficiency feeding during infancy and early childhood, and it will not be wrong to conclude that, most of the stagnation and waste in primary education is due to this incapacitated body and mind. Almost all the children of the rural schools get one full meal in the evening consisting of coarse-grain bread and *dal*. It is only the lucky few who can afford milk, meat, vegetables and *gur*. If an afternoon repast is allowed them, it consists of *gur* and parched gram or corn. It has been found that most of these children suffer from stomatitis, constipation, and various death-dealing diseases. This is the destiny of multiple thousands—the hardworked, underfed, and neglected youngsters—whose neglect will, in the long run, cost India's most important national industry too heavily for words.

The most efficient public health service will fail in its fundamental object of producing a strong and healthy race if the diet of the population it serves remains deficient in quantity and quality. Along with sanitation and physical education, every public or private health organization should include nutrition work in its programme. Most of the children leave the village school in the

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<sup>17</sup>Modern Review—April 1935, p. 482.

<sup>18</sup>"Nutrition and Child Welfare"—paper read at the Health and Agricultural Exhibition, Ootacamund, May, 1936, by W. Aykroyd.

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ninth or tenth year because their parents look upon them as working dependents. They are often forced to do hard work at tender ages, and if they do not receive sufficient nutrition, they fall victims to ill-health and premature death. Therefore the problem of welfare of Indian children is closely dependent on diet. It is only by means of vigorous public health efforts, by attempts to educate the masses in rational dietetics, and by directing particular attention to the diet of women in the child-bearing period, that we can effectively combat malnutrition and its effects among the rural masses. Reforms such as these involve much labour and expense, and often demand patient toil over a long period of time. But the best progress is always slow and therefore lasting. At present there is dearth of scientific and reliable data to draw out dependable conclusions, but the recent interest shown by private and Government bodies in Rural Research will in the near future throw ample light on these obscure, though most important, problems of rural and national welfare.

## CHAPTER VI.

### AGRESTIC SERFDOM IN NORTHERN INDIA

*Slave Labour in Agriculture:* The employment of human labour in agriculture gives rise to many problems with regard to the type and conditions of work which are of supreme importance. In almost every country of the world, forced labour has played an important part by supplying a permanent source of labour power in times when family and hired help was scarce. Although agriculture was regarded as the most honourable of all professions, it was, nevertheless, considered a suitable employment for slaves, who ultimately outnumbered the other types of workers. In European countries rural serfdom survived the middle ages, being ultimately abolished by the French Revolution in the eighteenth century, or by more constitutional means in the nineteenth century in Germany, in most cases peasant proprietary taking its place. In Russia, prior to the Great War, despite measures to establish them as tenants, those peasants who were not cultivating the open fields on medieval lines, were labouring on the estates of great land-owners under conditions akin to servitude.<sup>1</sup> In the U.S.A. also scarcity of labour together with abundance of land, invariably raised serious difficulties, and to meet them, combined or forced labour was freely employed by the early colonists. The Greek and Roman city-states fed their own democracy by the exploitation and autocratic rule of neighbouring agricultural regions, where they enslaved enormous masses of the populations.<sup>2</sup>

Slave labour was a conspicuous feature in Ancient India. The Law Book of Narada enumerated fifteen different varieties of them. The *Kutumbins*, who cultivated land as a subsidiary means of livelihood, were understood by Kielhorn to be only serfs. Similarly, the *Upāvāsas* who formed the bulk of the landless class flourished in an aggressive state of serfdom. Kautilya gave it his sanction as the lawful privilege of Government servants and the land-owning

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<sup>1</sup>Ogg and Sharp, *Economic Development of Modern Europe*, pp. 20-38, and 305-313.

<sup>2</sup>Sorokin, Zimmerman, & Galpin: *Systematic Source Book in Rural Sociology*, Vol. II, p. 573.

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classes.<sup>3</sup> The number of slaves was increased from time to time when the villagers captured in a war by an enemy were sold as agricultural slaves, or by addition of persons who sold themselves to landlords during famines and to money-lenders for relieving themselves from the burden of cumulative debts.

The institution of slavery in India, with special reference to agricultural slaves, seems to have been established in very remote times, and is linked up with the idea of innate dependence of *Sudras* and their perpetual slavery as one of the axioms of Brahmanism; because the *Sudra* issued from the feet of *Purusa*, the primeval male, feet denoting service. Thus the original slaves were called *Dasas* or *Sewaks*, terms which signify eternal, social and economic dependence, and the existence of *Dasas* was considered a liability redeemable only by service.

During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, agricultural slavery was commonly prevalent in nearly all the parts of India. Wherever it lost its force, by pressure of custom or law, it existed in the milder forms of *Begar*, or forced labour, as a social liability to landlords by virtue of their property ownership, which is still a common feature of all the villages under legal protection. The institution of slavery has still a stronghold in all the agriculturally backward regions of India, and the agricultural serfs can be seen toiling in Kumaon, Oudh, Bihar and Chota Nagpur to earn their scanty bread by the sweat of their brow.

Wherever the status of the peasant proprietor has been encroached upon by high caste money-lenders and absentee landlords, who have broken through the weak systems of tenancy, and usurped the land of poorer classes, the farm-hand verges on slavery like that of the *Chakar* in Bengal, *Kamia* in Bihar and Chota Nagpur, *Hurwahee* in Central India and Orissa, *Sewak* in the U.P., *Shalkari* in the C.P. and Berar, *Padial* in Madras.

**Transition to Serfdom:** There is not a single social institution that is strictly separated from kindred institutions. "As the distinction between different forms of slavery are indefinite", says Spencer, "so must there be an indefinite distinction between slavery and serfdom, and between the several forms of serfdom".<sup>4</sup> Much confusion arises, therefore, in describing Agrestic Serfdom as it is found in India, because it can hardly be separated from slavery true and proper, and

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<sup>3</sup>Dr. Pran Nath, *A Study in the Economic Condition of Ancient India*. 1929—pp. 154-157.

<sup>4</sup>*Principles of Sociology*, p. 472.

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other shades of agricultural slavery. A few distinctions may, however, be possible:—

Slavery is not a primitive institution, as is admitted by such authorities as Neiboer, Westermarck, Ingram and Gilbertson. It is essentially an industrial institution of later growth. It is negligible in the collectional economic stage, but in the pastoral stage it had gained good ground. In the third stage, where agriculture became the principal source of subsistence and other primitive occupations were made subservient to agriculture, slavery became most prominent. Gilbertson observed that, "slavery is much more common among such tribes as subsist chiefly by agriculture."<sup>5</sup> Where agriculture is carried on without the aid of domestic animals, while population is scarce, the land is covered with wilds and the implements are crude—it is not the capital that is wanted, but labour, to feed the growing population and to extend the cultivated area. This sometimes requires compulsory labour beyond the limits of family relations.

Slavery is the subjection of men individually, and a subjection which includes the whole personality of the slave. The master of a slave is entitled to all the services of the slave including his personality or his very existence which makes him a living chattel. Serfdom, on the other hand, is the subjection of men individually or collectively for rendering services to the master in lieu of some obligation.

The transition to serfdom took place when the master parted with, or was deprived of the property in person of the slave, but became entitled only to his services, or a determinate portion of them.<sup>6</sup> This is a correct statement with the exception that the right, not to the services of the labourer, but to "a determinate portion" of them is the real differential of serfdom. "For", as Neiboer points out, "he who is entitled to all the services of another is his owner." He contends that, "the slave owner may do with his slave whatever he is not by special laws forbidden to do; the master of a serf may require from his men such services or tributes only as the law allows him to require."<sup>7</sup>

Shadings of status under serfdom are often hard to distinguish, and explanations of this term vary in accordance with the countries and times on which they are based. Customs are largely responsible

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<sup>5</sup>Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics—pp. 596-598.

<sup>6</sup>J. K. Ingram: History of Slavery and Serfdom—p. 202.

<sup>7</sup>Neiboer: Slavery as an Industrial System—p. 670.



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for the gradual transition of personal servitude into group servitude. The ruling class assumption that all customary rights originated in grants from lords, and that attachment to soil is a necessary condition of serfdom, is not a reliable criterion. Because in many cases the serfs are people who have lost their holdings and stock through incompetence, bad luck or breaches of custom, and are working for the more fortunate classes. Moreover, population increase often outruns expansion into new lands, and it overflows into classes which are unwanted and destitute rather than definitely oppressed and exploited. The "Villain Francs" and "Sokemen" who lived in the French and English manorial villages were rarely allowed to commend themselves to other lords or to leave at least with such property as livestock. Yet, on the other hand, where an economic shortage of labourers existed, a powerful lord might induce even serfs to desert other manors under his protection and with specific improvements in their status. By and large, serfdom has been the mark of low grade economies, where the ruling classes were more anxious about the labour supply than about the supply of land.<sup>8</sup>

In this process of transition an important gap existing between slavery and serfdom is filled up by voluntary slavery, an imitation of slavery true and proper. This involves the element of contract, whereby the person who gives up his liberty, confers upon another, by contract, either for a limited period or for ever, the same rights over himself as a master possesses over his slave. Slavery proper is not based upon a contract between the parties concerned, and the master has a right to avail himself of the working power of his slave without previous agreement on the part of the latter; while in voluntary slavery, labour is exacted according to the previous agreement.<sup>9</sup>

Serfdom in India is characteristically a 'group status, where custom still mainly controls status and tenure. The depressed and exterior castes are supposed to be degraded and despised and their members are in collective subjection to the members of the higher castes. The fate of many caste-groups, whether due to poverty, low birth or the nature of occupation, is sealed by forces of socio-economic nature which are often beyond their control. Serfdom, however, in all parts of India, does not amount to personal servitude. It is usufruct-servitude, with a right to enjoy a thing, the property of

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<sup>8</sup>A. N. Gilbertson, "Slavery", *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*.

<sup>9</sup>*Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, Op. Cit., pp. 596-601.

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which is vested in another, and to take its fruits, but not to destroy or fundamentally to alter its substance. While it extends for life, the usufruct right might be created for a fixed term, or it may not be terminated by the death of the holder.<sup>10</sup>

Serfdom, therefore, will be used in the following pages, to designate, firstly, a group subjection; and secondly, a usufruct personal servitude. No doubt, under bad masters, it has assumed the form of primitive slavery and involved the entire personality of the serf. But recent legislation in all parts of India against slavery has brought this institution into a stage of transition. Thus we have passed on from *slavery* to *serfdom*, and now to *begar* which is simply a seasonal servitude justified by both custom and law

*Historical Sidelights: Chota Nagpur:* In Chota Nagpur, the Mundas were the first and original reclaimers of the soil. In the 10th century A.D., Munda chiefs had imposed supremacy.<sup>11</sup> The Oraons arrived later and lived in great harmony, having subjected the Munda chiefs. But from the 12th century A.D., the original reclaimers of the wilds were successively crushed by Cheros and Kharawars who subsequently exercised dominion from Allahabad to Ranchi.<sup>12</sup> The first systematic influx of hordes of middlemen began in the closing years of the 13th century A.D., most of these coming from Bihar and eastern United Provinces. By a systematic policy of money-lending, these *Dikkus* had gradually assumed supremacy over large stretches of land, and soon became untowanted jagirdars. With the increase of Hindu jagirdars there grew a competition for raiyats. But with small holdings and high rents, the tenants had to depend, for part of the year at least, on such employment as the landlords should choose to give them. This tendency soon gave rise to a competition for serfs, rather than for the raiyats, and each attempt of the landlords to stabilize their labour power was a definite move towards the conversion of the free peasantry into serfdom. The institution of agrestic serfdom, therefore, had been established long before the British occupation of the Chota Nagpur territories.

In 1865 Prof. Wilson defined the *Sewak* of Chota Nagpur as "a person who becomes a slave for life on receiving a certain sum of money and who cannot redeem himself by repayment of the original

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<sup>10</sup>Nieboer, *Op. Cit.* p. 671. (see usufruct right).

<sup>11</sup>J. Reid: *Survey and Settlement Report, Ranchi*, p. 7.

<sup>12</sup>T. W. Bridges: *Rent Rate and Settlement Report, Palamau*, pp. 90-93.

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advance". These *Sewaks* were recruited from the low hill-castes and tribes of Ramgarh and Hazaribagh districts. Sir W. Hunter in his statistical account of Hazaribagh in 1872, mentioned three classes of *Sewaks*, (1) the *Sewak* who is hereditary, (2) the *Bandha Sewak*, a slave for life, but whose children are not slaves, (3) the *Chota Sewak*, a slave for debt under a written bond. It was Hunter's firm belief that the system was introduced by the moneyed Hindu settlers. In 1886 the Jesuit Missionaries after converting a number of slave labourers to Christianity, liberated them from the bonds of serfdom. The report of the Bailey Conference with missionaries and landlords in 1890 brought to light the existence of *Kamiantuti* as a universal feature of Chota Nagpur. The first systematic survey was made by Sifton in 1908 who observed that agricultural slavery was extending in all parts of Hazaribagh, and that the entire Bhuiya race was brought under servitude. In 1913 Bridges found that more than 60,000 persons of Palamau district were agricultural slaves and a moiety of the remainder were half-slaves. In 1930 Dr. Radhakamal Mukerjee during an unofficial investigation found that many villages of Ranchi, Hazaribagh and Palamau districts in Chota Nagpur were populated only by landless serfs, and our investigations (1934-36) have brought to light the existence of a large number of *Kamias* in almost all parts of the Chota Nagpur Plateau.

**Bihar:** The nature and extent of slavery in Bihar cannot be estimated from the available data beyond the middle of the 18th century. From the proceedings of the Council of Revenue, dated 17th May, 1774, we learn that vending of persons as slaves was abolished in the Bhagalpur district. Early in 1789 the Collector of Shahabad wrote to Lord Cornwallis requesting speedy instructions as to the manner in which he should determine cases of slavery. In 1816 the Magistrate of Tipperah brought to the notice of the Registrar of the Court of Circuit for Dacca, the traffic in female slaves.

In 1809, Dr. Buchanan made a minute survey of some of the districts of Bihar where he gives the most graphic description of slavery in that province. In his Purnea report he classified slaves under the following heads:—(1) *Domestic slaves*, who lived entirely in their master's houses, but were allowed to marry. Their children were also slaves, and their women acted as domestic servants. These slaves were also treated well and fared as well as the ordinary class of servants. (b) *Agricultural Slaves*, of petty landlords, who were employed in agricultural operations. They were allowed a separate hut and small garden for themselves and their families. The allow-

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ance usually given to a slave was a piece of coarse cloth and about 985 lbs. of coarse grain. His wife too could be requisitioned to serve the master. (c) *Slave-Superintendents*, who served as agents to great landlords, were in a comfortable position. They were given farms free of rent. The farm was large enough to support a family. These slaves had to attend to their lords, sometimes on grand occasions, to swell out his numerous train, but usually as domestics or as confidential persons to whom he could safely entrust the superintendence of his affairs. (d) *Bond-slaves*, who had to plough the field of their masters without adequate remuneration, because they had taken loans from them. The loan given varied from 5 to 20 rupees and no interest was charged on it. These ploughmen received an allowance of paddy or of some other coarse grain at harvest, which amounted to rupees fifteen a year. (This class of slaves later on assumed the name *Kamiauti*, which is still prevalent all over the province).

From the account of Dr. Buchanan Hamilton we learn that slavery was a common feature of Bihar in the 18th century. It was limited to agricultural operations, but slaves were commonly employed to perform various kinds of services as is evident from the answers of the Muftis and Pandits to the questions put by the Nizam-Adalat in 1809. It was stated that the master might employ slaves in baking, cooking, dyeing and washing clothes; as agents in merchantile transactions; in attending cattle, tillage or cultivation; as carpenters, iron-mongers, goldsmiths, weavers, shoe-makers, boatmen, twisters of silk, water-drawers, ferriers, brick-layers and the like. He may hire them out on service in any of the above capacities; he may also employ them himself, or for the use of his family in other duties, of a domestic nature, such as in fetching water for washing, anointing his body with oil, rubbing his feet, or attending his person while dressing, and in guarding the door of his house, etc. He may also have connection with his legal female slave, provided she is arrived at the years of maturity and the master has not previously given her in marriage to another.

The statement of the Pandits was also similar to this, who affirmed that, "the owner of a male or female slave might require of such slave the performance of impure work, such as plastering and sweeping the house, cleaning the door, gateway, rubbing his

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master's naked body with oil and clothing him; removing fragments of victuals left at his master's table, and eating them, removing urine and human ordure, rubbing his feet, etc."<sup>13</sup>

*Cooch Behar*: In 1800 a traveller observed, that, the condition of the indebted agriculturists, who, under the influence of Purnea and other slave districts of Bihar, had been reduced to serfdom, was seriously lamentable. "If a ryot, or peasant, owed a sum of money, and had not the ability to satisfy his creditor, he was compelled to give up his wife as a pledge, and possession was kept of her till the debt was discharged. If during her residence and connection with the creditor, a family had been the consequence, half of it was considered as the property of the person with whom she lived, and half that of her real husband."<sup>14</sup> Such a state of affairs and barbarous customs never prevailed in any part of Bihar. The Bihar peasants, in their needs, mortgaged their own services but seldom those of their women folk.

*Santal Parganas*: Agrestic serfdom in these districts dates back to the middle of the 18th century. In 1790 forced Santal labour was used in Birbhum to clear jungles and reclaim land for cultivation. In 1809, according to Buchanan Hamilton, the Santal labourers had migrated to Dumka in consequence of the annoyance which they received from their master zamindars. In 1818 Southerland found them busy clearing forests under servile bondage, and in 1836 Dunbar observed that the Ghatwals and Dikkus had completely enslaved them as bond servants.

The Santal insurrection which broke out in 1854 was due to the oppression of usurers, who had gradually, but surely, usurped the lands of *Khunt-Kattidars*. Most of these Santal rebels were now landless men, who had lost their land, and were reduced to *Kamiauti*. The Santals, therefore, had directed their slaughter to mahajans and landlords with a view to reclaim their lands, and to free themselves from *Kamiauti* bondage by resorting to force. In 1855 most brutal outrages were made upon the money-lenders and *Kamia*-masters, who were responsible for introducing this system of slavery by sheer power of money. "When a Mahajan fell into their hands, they first cut off his feet with their *pharsas*, with the taunt that that was four-annas in the rupee, then cut off his legs at the thigh to make up eight annas, then cut him in two at his

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<sup>13</sup>B. B. Majumdar: "Slavery in Bihar a Century Ago," Article published in the "Searchlight", Patna, Dec. 12, 1934.

<sup>14</sup>Majumdar, op. cit. p. 2.

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waist to make up twelve annas, and finally took off his head to complete the sixteen annas—shouting 'Pharkhati', i.e., full quit-tance.<sup>15</sup>

In 1859, the "Statement Showing the Material and Moral Progress of India" showed that, serfdom still prevailed in the Santal Parganas, known by the name of Kamiauti or Hurwahee. A *Kamia* bondsman was one who, in consideration of a sum of money, bound himself and his heirs to serve the giver of the loan until the money was repaid with interest. He lived in the house of his creditor. A Hurwahee bondsman lived in his own house, but had to serve the master whenever his services might be required. None of them had any means to free himself from the bondage and the burden of loan, and consequently slavery descended from father to son. It was only after the Mutiny in 1858, that the prevalence of this system was brought to the notice of the authorities, but no immediate measures were taken to check it by legal or social control.

*Vestigial Remains of Serfdom:* Serfdom in some form or the other, in the sub-montane regions of northern India, appears to be an old and hereditary practice. If one travels along the Himalayan base, from the highlands of Kashmir to the Brahmaputra basin, he will find various forms of slavery associated with agricultural practices of different regions. Purely physico-environmental, rather than social, causes are responsible for the consistent prevalence and inertia of agrestic serfdom in these parts of the country. The institution, as old as the cultural history of the Aryans, has flourished unimpaired by the vagaries of times and has played an important part in the rural economy of these regions. The vestigial remains of agrestic serfdom are still to be found under different forms in the following places:—

(a) *The Haliyas and Chyoras of Kumaon:*—These are household slaves as well as slaves for the cultivation of the land, and are recruited from the Khasiya and Dom castes respectively. Both these classes of slaves are dependent upon their owners for food, shelter and clothing, and an obligation for the discharge of marriage expenses. Slavery in the form of household women slaves (who are also sold for immoral purposes) are not uncommon even under strict prohibitory measures, but temporary slave labourers have not yet been prohibited.<sup>16</sup> Upto 1840, the name Haliya was given to

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<sup>15</sup>O'Malley—District Gazetteer, Santal Parganas, pp. 51-52.

<sup>16</sup>United Provinces, District Gazetteer, Almora.

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those Doms who were employed as ploughmen with their families, and could be sold with or without the land. The Chyora, or the domestic slave, could, with his family, be sold or given away without any reason assigned. None of the other Doms could be sold, although each was obliged to do service for the villagers according to the trade or occupation he practised, but they were entitled to receive a present in return. The Haliyas, who are mostly Doms, are almost solely confined to the hill-pattis and the bhabar, and along with other tribal castes, like the Ruriyas, Bhuls, Bhairsuwas and Orhs, constitute the bulk of slave labour population." In Bhabar and Kashipur slave labour is recruited from Kolis, Agaris, and Chamars, while in the interior of Garhwal, as far as Gorakhpur, the Tharus take the place of Doms and Chamars. All these castes represent apparently an aboriginal race and from time immemorial have played the part of serfs to the agricultural castes of Bhotias. Khas-Rajputs and Bagbans.<sup>17</sup>

(b) *The Sewaks and Hariyas of Oudh*: The Sewak system is prevalent mostly in the Tarai Districts of Gonda, Bahraich, Basti, Gorakhpur, Kheri and Pilibhit, and everywhere east of the Ghagra river, and appears in one form or another under modified conditions. The Koris, Chamars, Doms, Nats, Ghoriyas, and Tharus, who are generally landless labourers, form the bulk of the Sewak population, and are practically the slaves of their employers. The Hariya is a seasonal serf whereas the Sewak is a permanent slave.<sup>18</sup> Both Hariya and Sewak are a debt bondage pure and simple, but they are rendered more complicated by the presence of customary rights of the zamindars and the ignorance of the serfs. Under the Hariya system any man, of one of the low castes, receives a sum of money and binds himself to work on the field of his creditor, or perform any work of such nature, thereby repaying his debt by his services, and becoming a free man at the termination of this contract. Under the Sewak system, the borrower binds himself and his children down to the remotest generation.<sup>19</sup> The ordinary sum so given varies from Rs. 20/- to Rs. 100/- according to the necessity of the borrower, which, it must be noted, does not bear interest. The Sewak remains a serf for life or till he pays off the advance, a contingency which in actual experience hardly ever occurs. It is quite common to meet men whose fathers entered into these obligations, and who still labour in their discharge, although well aware that they can

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<sup>17</sup>Nevill: District Gazetteer of the U.P., Vol. XXXIV, Naini Tal.

<sup>18</sup>The United Provinces District Gazetteer, Bahraich.

<sup>19</sup>Settlement Report, Gonda (Oudh).

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discard them and be free to sell their labour in the open market.<sup>20</sup> In accordance with the terms of contract (Sewak-Nama), a Sewak is supposed to be the claimant of one-sixth of the produce, whatever crop it may be, of the land on which he has worked as ploughman, weeder and reaper. But in practice, this one-sixth share of the produce does not exceed ten Panseries (each of  $2\frac{1}{2}$  standard seers), because on large plots of land several Sewaks and their family-hands are simultaneously employed. As a rule, the terms of payment vary from one-sixth to one-tenth of the harvest, or five to ten Panseries of the commodity produced, whichever is lower. This includes the share of the Sewak's wife (one to two Panseries of produce) if she regularly performs her duties of grinding grain for the master's family, of making cowdung cakes for fuel, and of working as a domestic servant. The labour of a Sewak's children is assessed independently. In spite of the hard and continuous service, and irrespective of the nature and conditions of work, the Sewak and his family never receive more than what is necessary for their bare subsistence, lest they should repay their debt and for ever be lost to their master.<sup>21</sup>

The system, however, appears to be dying out, chiefly due to the fact that the debt cannot be enforced by law. In these districts, the average debt of the Sewaks has now sunk from Rs. 100/- to Rs. 40/-, possibly due to the increased supply of labour. Now a modified form exists, whereby, in consideration of a small payment and the customary dole, the labourer hires himself out for a year. Under this system, (called Ulti-Sewak), the amount advanced does not exceed Rs. 12/- in addition to one-sixth or one-seventh of the crop, with a blanket in winter and possibly a couple of maunds of grain on festival or marriage.<sup>22</sup> The position of the labourer, however, in the long run, becomes the same as that of a Sewak, because the rate of interest is so exorbitant that even when receiving cash wages he is never able to pay more than the interest during the year.<sup>23</sup>

(c) *The Hurwahees and Baramasiyas of North Bihar*: The lowest depth of serfdom is touched by the Baramasiyas of Bettiah, Motihari, Darbhanga, and Partabganj in North Bihar, who perform whatever menial services are required of them by their masters. Whatever be the origin of this system, there is no denying the fact,

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<sup>20</sup>Revised Rent Rate and Settlement Report, District Bahraich United Provinces, 1932.

<sup>21</sup>Lorenzo. op. cit. Chapter II. P. 46.

<sup>22</sup>District Gazetteer, Bahraich (Revised, 1932).

<sup>23</sup>Rent Rate Report of Nanpara Pargana, District Bahraich, 1931.



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that the master assumes a hereditary right over the very existence of these unfortunate labourers and their families. The Baramasiyas, or Deblors as they are called, are purely domestic slaves and their serfdom is hereditary, whereas the Hurwahees are bond servants who work in lieu of the interest due on the loan.<sup>24</sup>

The Baramasiyas are given a small pittance, but allowed a house and the left-over food from their master's table. Their duties are varied and many, and day and night they have to be in attendance on their master. These people do not run away on account of the fear of the divine powers of their master, and therefore prefer the ills rather than take the risk of losing their job. It is really a matter for surprise how they manage to subsist on insufficient food and clothing. The Hurwahees, on the other hand, get  $2\frac{1}{2}$  seers of paddy as wages and 1 seer of *Jalpan*. A Hurwahee's wife is not a slave but can earn independently. Money wages are still rare, and the Hurwahees do not get more than  $\frac{3}{5}$  of the wages of ordinary labourers, the difference thus representing the interest paid from day to day on the money advanced by the landlords.<sup>25</sup>

The Hurwahees belong to very low castes, like the Musahars, Dusadhs and Chamars. They live in a kind of social thralldom, sometimes selling themselves, their wives and children, to lifelong serfdom for paltry sums. They have an ingrained aversion to emigration. They subsist on roots, rats, snails, shells, etc., and live in hovels which seem unsuitable even for pigs. They are usually thriftless and extravagant in drinks and feasts, and when they want a loan the only thing they can pledge is their labour. The terms of contract are usually very exacting as will be seen from the following specimen bonds:—

I. "Agreement between A. B., a Musahar of village Mablepur, Pargana Parbatpur, Zila Monghyr, on the one hand, and Babu C.D., Rajput, on the other. In consideration of receiving rupees five in cash, to celebrate his marriage, A.B., hereby binds himself to plough, sow, irrigate and reap the fields of C.D., and perform faithfully all the duties of a Kamya or Bondman. The said A.B., binds himself to continue in the service of his master C.D., and never to refuse doing any work imposed on him. Morning and evening, day and night, he will be present and ready to work, and he will never absent

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<sup>24</sup>Sinha, B.A., Agricultural Commission Report, Evidence Volume XIII, Bihar and Orissa.

<sup>25</sup>Tallents: Bihar and Orissa District Gazetteer, Palamau District, Revised Edition 1926. pp. 130-142.

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himself even for a visit to a friend or relation without leave. If on any occasion, the said A.B., should absent himself, that day's work will be placed to his debt, and he will be liable for such damages as Her Majesty's Courts of Law may direct. In addition to the above duties, the said A. B. binds himself to furnish the said C.D., with the following commodities, as may be directed by a council of peers of the said C.D.—thatching grass, bamboos, strings, wood and other things. This deed is executed in good faith—22nd Asarh, 1265."<sup>26</sup>

II. "I, Sohan Bhuinyar, resident of Mouza Diha, Pargana Pahra, in the District of Bihar, do hereby acknowledge to have taken an advance of Rs. 24/14/- for agreeing to work as a Kamia and menial servant from Jainu Singh, by caste Rajput, of Diha. In this document which I execute, I willingly and voluntarily bind myself to plough on Nakdi and Bhaoli lands of Jainu Singh, and to grow cotton, sugarcane, etc., for him, and to work wherever the lands of Jainu Singh may be situated. I and my descendants for ever bind ourselves to be ready to perform any work given to us, and to perform all the duties of a menial servant without objection. If at any time I abscond I shall be liable to be brought back by the said Jainu Singh by force and shall offer no objection, and if I refuse to return or offer resistance I shall be liable to pay the Nakdi and Bhaoli produce of one plough and Rs. 100/- in cash, and then I and my descendants can be released from our obligations. I shall be paid the same diet allowance or wages as is customary in this village and around. If I cause any other work of the aforesaid Jainu Singh to suffer he shall have authority to administer justice as he thinks proper. For the above this document is executed by way of *Sewaknama* so that it may be of use where occasion requires. Dated 15th Asarh, 1262 Fasli."<sup>27</sup>

These agreements were such that they could not legally be enforced, but Hurwahees did not know this, and they practically differed from slaves only in the fact that they could redeem themselves, if they could obtain the amount of money advanced under the bond. The Kamiauti Agreements Act (Act VIII of 1920) makes such contracts void if the term for which labour is to be rendered exceeds one year, if the debt is not to be extinguished with the term, or if fair remuneration is not to be provided for the labour. The Act does not apply to Agreements entered into by 'skilled workmen' so that

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<sup>26</sup>O'malley: Settlement Report, Monghyr, 1926, pp. 132-133.

<sup>27</sup>Settlement Report, Gaya, Appendix XIII.

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the old Kamiauti conditions may still apply to labour rendered by such persons as Chamars. This Act has not been effective in suppressing the abuse.<sup>28</sup>

(d) *The Chakars and Muliya of Orissa*: Early in the eighteenth century Maddox observed that in the coast districts of Orissa a system prevailed by which labourers were retained on undefined contracts from year to year. In 1831 Buchanan Hamilton found that slave labour, known as Muliya, was a common feature of many 'thanas' of Cuttack and Puri districts. Sir John Edgar, formerly of the Bengal Government, found that "the Muliya are evidently the descendants of the forest races by whom the uplands of Orissa were inhabited before the Aryan conquest. Their ancestors, hemmed in on all sides by the advancing immigrants, either took refuge in the then inaccessible hills of the interior, or remained as landless serfs in the tracts once held by them, helping their conquerors to work in the fields or being employed by them in menial work."<sup>29</sup> These serfs were employed to clear the forests for cultivation and were allowed to catch game, to collect various edible roots and fruits, and to cut timber. Gradually the conquerors' control was tightened over them to ensure a ready supply of labour both for domestic and agricultural purposes.

In Cuttack, the permanent agricultural labourers, called *Halias*, are bound by deeds, either registered or not, to serve their masters, called *Sahus*, on wages fixed in kind, which vary from two to three seers of paddy per day. They are allowed to hold lands from the latter on the principle of service tenure in lieu of part of the wages.<sup>30</sup> In Midnapur the bond serfs are called *Kuthias*, who enter into an agreement, called *Kuta*, to plough or harvest the fields in return for the interest on loan of about twenty rupees. In Balasore, at present, there are three kinds of agricultural serfs.<sup>31</sup> (1) *The Chakar or Nitmajur*, whose social position is *de facto* that of a slave, is employed as a domestic serf. Usually his ancestor had obtained a loan which descends from generation to generation and from which there is no escape. He receives both board and lodging and some clothes once in the year. As a rule he sleeps on the premises of his master, but during the harvest time he sleeps on the field to keep a watch over the

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<sup>28</sup>The Royal Agricultural Commission Report, Bihar and Orissa, Vol. XIII, (Oral Evidence, W. B. Heycock).

<sup>29</sup>Mansfield P. T., District Gazetteer, Puri, 1929, pp. 78-79.

<sup>30</sup>Resettlement Operation of Banki Government State, Cuttack, Orissa.

<sup>31</sup>Dr. Radhakamal Mukerjee, *op. cit.* p. 228.

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crops. He is seldom given cash. (2) The *Naga* or *Hariya Muliya* whose position is for all practical purposes similar to that of the *Chakar*, does not receive board and lodging from his master. He gets only two or three seers of paddy on the days he works, and is given an area of about 20-25 decimals of land as his "Heta" which he is allowed to cultivate with ploughs and seeds provided by his master. He is also given one dhoti and one gamcha (a kind of towel) in the year.<sup>32</sup> This class represents the "cultivating serfs" attached permanently to their masters' land. (3) The *Danda Muliya*, who enters into a contract with his employer, and engages himself for a short period (usually the sowing and harvesting) at specified wages, gets only four seers of paddy and the afternoon meal on working days, but no clothes. Though reduced to the status of a serf, the *Danda Muliya* is a casual agricultural worker, free to move from one field to another at will.

The wealthy Brahman villages contain a large proportion of Chakars and Naga Muliyas, while in the small and poor villages the Danda or Uparai Muliyas are more usual. The Muliyas are recruited from the aboriginal castes like the Bauris, Savars, Khonds, and Pariahs, who have neither land nor any other means of subsistence. All these classes of labourers are bond servants and are in a state of serfdom. Whatever be the terms of agreement, as regards the tenure of service, hours of work, and rates of wages, the Haliyas cannot free themselves from the obligation to work for their employers until they have repaid this advance. The condition of all these labourers is very unsatisfactory. Before the harvest, when stocks are low, they seldom receive the bare minimum of subsistence, although they are a little better off during the harvest time. However, the system does lead to oppression as the Muliya cannot generally free himself from his bondage even if he really wishes to, and cases of long continued service under one contract are not rare. In fact, therefore, these labourers are practically serfs, who may be described as 'Ascripti Domino' rather than 'Ascripti Glebae'.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>32</sup>Dalziel: *Revision Settlement of Orissa—192-32*, p. 7.

<sup>33</sup>Mansfield, *op. cit.* pp. 196-197.

## CHAPTER VII

### THE KAMIAS OF CHOTA NAGPUR

*Characteristic Features of Chota Nagpur:* The Plateau of Chota Nagpur lies 500 ft. above sea level in the south of Bihar, and comprises rich winding valleys, open uplands and wooded hills. With an area of 38,000 sq. miles and a population of little more than 8½ million, it is more markedly rural than Bihar. Although the pressure on soil, being about 222 to the square mile, is much lower than in Bihar, the natural resources of this region cannot fully support the population.<sup>1</sup> There is, therefore, a great deal of emigration, both seasonal and permanent, to the mining and industrial centres of Bihar and Bengal, and to the tea gardens of Assam.

Ethnologically, it is a heterogeneous province. Half the population is aboriginal, while another ten per cent. are low caste Hindus of aboriginal stock, absorbed long ago into Hinduism. It is the home of the aboriginal and quasi-aboriginal tribes, which seem to have occupied the plateau in the 10th century and reclaimed the wilds for cultivation. But they were crushed and expropriated by the successive invasions of the Cheros, Kharwars, Hindus, Sikhs, and Moham-madans.<sup>2</sup>

The subjugation of the aboriginal tribes, and the occupation of land by alien settlers from Bihar and the U.P., wrought some significant changes in the rural economy of the province. The most serious consequences have been the expropriation of the native peasantry and the degradation of poor cultivators and labourers to the ranks of agricultural serfs. Though uncommon to many parts of India, agricultural serfdom has reached its culmination in Chota Nagpur, where high caste landowners have spared no efforts to perpetuate this system even in the teeth of bitter opposition both from the public and the Government.

*Who are the Kamias?* The Kamias of Chota Nagpur Plateau represent a class of agricultural serfs who cultivate the fields of their masters, and perform other agricultural operations which were once entrusted to slaves, both in India as well as other countries of the

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<sup>1</sup>Bihar and Orissa Census Report, 1931, Part I.

<sup>2</sup>E. Lister; Bihar and Orissa District Gazetteer, Hazaribagh, p. 129.

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world. Slavery was a common feature of Bihar, Orissa and western Bengal, and it is only due to the influence of alien invaders that this system was imported into Chota Nagpur.<sup>3</sup>

The Kamias are bond servants of their masters. In return for a loan received, they bind themselves, and often their generations, to perform whatever menial services are required of them in lieu of the interest due on the loan. Such loans are usually borrowed at the time of economic distress or social necessity.<sup>4</sup>

It is usually the poor labourers and low caste agriculturists who are victimized by those rich and high caste ryots and landlords, who do not care to do the actual cultivation themselves. In Chota Nagpur, owing to the presence of a large aboriginal and depressed caste population, the Kamia system flourishes under various designations.

The term Kamia, in short, stands for the fourfold characteristics of an agricultural labourer, i.e. a field worker whose labour is exacted by force; a working client of a mahajan-cum-landlord master; a farm-hand whose duties are varied and many, and without whom the private land of the landlord (viz. "Sir" and "Khudkasht") may lie uncultivated; and a sweated class of workers, underfed and mentally stunted, and regarded by the exploiting masters as little better than human chattel.

The Kamiauti system in its original form did not amount to slavery, although slavery, as an institution outside Kamiauti, did exist extensively in Bengal, Bihar and other parts of northern India. It grew in good faith and out of a felt need, but the pressure of circumstances and the influence of various social and economic conditions have provided the necessary 'pull' for its gradual transformation into primitive slavery.

The Kamiauti agreement is entirely a voluntary agreement. The debt is not enforced and the Kamia is allowed to go away when he pays back the money. Many of them have gone away after repaying their debts.<sup>5</sup> But this system is abused, as is most likely to be, by small landlords, who cannot subsist on land which cannot possibly yield sufficient net profits to maintain them in a style befitting zamindars if they have to pay a fair wage for the agricultural labour for its cultivation. Their social system generally prohibits personal

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<sup>3</sup>District Gazetteer, Santal Parganas, pp. 50-54.

<sup>4</sup>Agricultural Commission Report, Vol. XIII, Bihar and Orissa, Evidence by A. D. Tuckey.

<sup>5</sup>Royal Commission on Agriculture—Evidence Vol. XIII, Bihar and Orissa—p. 450.

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cultivation, a social system which could never have extended to such petty landlords but for the facilities of obtaining sweated labour afforded by the agrarian conditions of the district.<sup>6</sup>

It is, on the other hand, a contract where the master is entitled only to the services of the Kamia or to a determinate portion of them. but he is deprived of his property in the person of the Kamia. The Kamia is legally not a chattel, and the master can require from his serf only such services and tributes as the law allows him to require. But this time-honoured system has been put to much abuse, and the settled, though dependent, life of the Kamia has now made him a slave whose property in person passes from hand to hand in good title with every commercial transaction.

It has been found that the average principal debts of the Kamias range between Rs. 40/- and Rs. 50/- and the total amount of interest (at the current rate of 25 per cent.) does not exceed Rs. 12/8/- per annum. If the services of the Kamia are required to wipe off the interest alone, then 50 days full labour, taking four annas as the average daily wage for field labourers, will be sufficient to cover this demand. Including the principal, it would take a Kamia not more than 250 full days labour in the year to repay his debt completely and become a free man.\* But owing to a number of difficulties in his way, the Kamia cannot square his account in this manner.

The Kamia is a free man with this exception that he has no option to choose the required number of days which are demanded any time in the year at the convenience of the master. This makes the Kamia unable to move elsewhere in fear of abrupt orders of the master demanding his services. Moreover, there is no record of the number of days that he has laboured, which sometimes results in a life-long bondage. His services are not recognized as having the same value as that of an ordinary (free) labourer. His wages, which are payable in kind and at a much lower rate, are not adequate to maintain him even on the margin of subsistence. Hence the repayment of his loan becomes almost impossible. With these disabilities deliberately introduced in the way of the Kamias, the landlord has laid a tenacious hold on the very existence of these poor and humble helots. This plan of enforced economic dependence has brought the Kamias to a state of social and moral degradation, hitherto known as *agrestic serfdom*.

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<sup>6</sup>T. W. Bridges: *Survey and Settlement Report, Palamau*, p. 93.

\*Calculations based on average rate of wages prevailing in Chota Nagpur in 1936.

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The abuse of the system began when the poor aboriginal raiyats could not even pay the interest on loans taken from their landlords. Sometimes in lieu of the accruing interest they agreed to enhance their *Begar*,<sup>7</sup> which was readily accepted by the landlords who wanted to secure a permanent supply of labour. *Begar*, was a universal feature of northern India, as it is even now. It has to a great extent absorbed the original Kamiauti system. Kamiauti, therefore, is the result of a twofold obligation; *Begari*, a social obligation; and *Qarazdari*, an economic obligation.

Thus we find that the development of Kamiauti into serfdom is a later phase in the growth of this institution, and that it was only during the past century that Kamiauti reached its last stage, finally assuming the role of slavery.

*The Origin of the Kamia system: Two possible explanations:* (a) Sir W. W. Hunter laid stress on the conversion of the initial aboriginal labour, employed by the immigrant Hindus to create rice fields and develop the agricultural possibilities of a backward region, into bond slaves by sheer power of money.<sup>8</sup> But an intimate study of the districts of Chota Nagpur shows that the excuse for this system does not lie in the necessity of cheap labour for the development of a backward district. History shows that the pioneers of reclamation everywhere are the free aboriginal and quasi-aboriginal tribes who alone have the hardihood and energy to attack the natural difficulties confronting the would-be settlers in the jungle area. In Palamau the Cheros have still their land rights, and in Ranchi the Mundas still maintain their ancient rights unimpaired as *Khuntkattidars*.<sup>9</sup>

On the other hand, if this theory of cheap labour for the reclamation of forest land had any foundation, the Hunterganj, Chatra and Partabpur districts of Hazaribagh and the North-Eastern Districts of Palamau, where Kamiauti system has flourished for centuries, should have become agriculturally the most advanced. Instead, it has been proved by Sifton in the Hazaribagh Settlement Report, that the above mentioned districts are the most backward and unprogressive.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>Begar—a customary right of the landlords to free labour from their raiyats for a certain number of days in the year.

<sup>8</sup>Statistical Account of Lohardaga (Chota Nagpur) 1872.

<sup>9</sup>Pioneers of Cultivation who clear jungle spots generally around a spring in some valley or along the bank of a river. (Settlement Report, Palamau, p. 289).

<sup>10</sup>Sifton: Final Report on the Survey and Settlement Operations in the District of Hazaribagh, p. 289.



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At present, the Kamiauti system in Chota Nagpur is noticeable chiefly in Hazaribagh and Palamau, but is nearly extinct in Ranchi, Manbhum and Singhbhum. It will, however, be interesting to note that in the last three districts, in spite of the rapid growth of population, the reclamation of new land keeps pace with the increase of population more nearly than in Palamau and Hazaribagh, and the standard of comfort as represented by the area of cultivated land per head is much higher. Sifton has rightly maintained, that wherever aboriginals have been driven out by Biharis (as in Hazaribagh) and by Babhans and Mohammadans from the U.P. (as in Palamau), there has been agricultural deterioration. Thus we can safely assume that Hunter's theory of cheap labour does not stand as the sole cause of the origin of the Kamiauti system.

(b) The alien immigrants from Bihar, Bengal and the United Provinces, who conquered the country, could not work it. It was only the aboriginals who could stand the strain of hard labour and cultivate the '*Khas*' lands of the landlords. Hence the demand for free labour for the cultivation of the private land of the landlord must have resulted in the origin of the practice of binding the labourers by means of an advance, given conditionally upon their service remaining always at the beck and call of the landlord. Specially in those regions where labour is scarce or frequently moving, owing to the unfavourable economic conditions of the locality, the landlords substitute serf cultivators for a free peasant class.

Thus the chief explanation for the origin of the Kamia system lies in the need for the cultivation of the '*Khas*' land of landlords. In the aboriginal area of Hazaribagh the proportion of land appropriated to landlords is only 11 per cent. of riceland and 9 per cent. of upland, so that roughly 90 per cent. of the produce goes to the actual cultivators, most of whom are settled raiyats. But in the North-Western districts, which abound in Kamias, 47 per cent. of riceland and 31 per cent. of upland is in '*Khas*' cultivation of the landlords.<sup>11</sup> Similarly in the Palamau district, the landlords have always been eager to secure, and jealous to retain, slaves to cultivate their '*Khas*' lands, or half-slaves with holdings so small and rents so high that they must depend for part of the year at least on such employment as the landlords should choose to give them.<sup>12</sup> The genesis of the theory, therefore, rests on the fact that there was a competition for serfs, and not raiyats, for the cultivation of the landlords' '*Khas*' lands.

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<sup>11</sup>Sifton's Note in Hazaribagh Settlement Report, Paras 31 and 32.

<sup>12</sup>Palamau Settlement Report p. 119.

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*Constitution of the Kamia Population:* The Kamia population of Chota Nagpur is comprised of lower class people taken from the aboriginal, quasi-aboriginal and the exterior castes. In the Hazaribagh district, the Bhuiyas, Dusadhs, Kols, Santals, Ghatwars, and Koiris have mostly been reduced to serfdom. In Palamau district, the Chamsars, Kahars, Korwas, Pahariyas, Bhuians, Brinjhas and Mahals belong to this category. In this district, Mohammadan Kamias have also been met with. They belong chiefly to Julaha, Mali and Mallah castes. They fraternize freely with Hindus except in the North-East of the district where communal relations seem to be strained.<sup>13</sup>

Wherever the population of high caste landlords is large, the Kamia system is most prevalent. The Babhan, Rajput and Kayasth landlords aim directly at the enslavement of the aboriginal classes within their villages. In Hunterganj, Partabpur, Chatra, Gawan and Simaria sub-divisions where the population is chiefly of Goalas, Bhuiyas, Santals and other depressed castes, the Babhan and Rajput landlords have worked the Kamia system with severity. The Babhans of Chatra and the Rajputs of Chauparan, are notoriously cruel landlords in the Hazaribagh District, and are responsible for the emigration of most of the agricultural labourers (who had become Kamia-uti serfs), and the agricultural decline of these districts in consequence.

The population of most of the districts of Chota Nagpur is not only economically poor, but has a very low social status which keeps the working classes in a state of perpetual dependence and subjection. The total depressed class population in the five districts of Chota Nagpur is as follows:<sup>14</sup>

Districts	P. C. of primitive population to total population.	P. C. of exterior castes to total population.	Percentage of depressed castes and classes to total population.
ANGUL . . .	71.0	12.0	83.0
SINGHBHUM . . .	67.0	5.0	72.0
RANCHI . . .	59.0	5.5	64.5
SANTAL PARGANAS . . .	55.3	9.0	64.3
PALAMAU . . .	13.0	16.5	29.5

<sup>13</sup>Bihar and Orissa District Gazetteer, Palamau, Revised 1926.

<sup>14</sup>Bihar and Orissa Census Report—1931—Part I, (App. I, page 279, and App. IV. p. 290). Compiled.

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The high caste landlords and tenants who have succeeded in occupying the country can only extract a living for themselves by degrading the old and free raiyat population to serfdom. The alien invaders from Bihar and the United Provinces have completely dominated the indigenous castes, and by a gradual process of expropriation of the better aboriginal raiyat, the whole agricultural population has been made poor and dependent. These conditions, influenced by sub-infeudation and the Thikadari system, have hastened the conversion of the raiyats into poverty-stricken Kamias.

*Privileges of Kamias:* The Kamia is too valuable to be ill-treated. His master always anxiously looks after his (Kamia's) health and welfare, and provides him with at least the bare necessities of life. If the Kamia happens to inherit a bad master, he some times runs away to another village or to the coal-fields, and this causes a great setback in the agricultural routine of the master. The Kamia, therefore, has several privileges denied to the ordinary labourer:—

(1) The Kamia gets fed in times of scarcity. His wife and children also get clothes and a free house attached to a *Makan-bari* plot. The chief diet of the Kamia consists of coarse rice and *dal*, which can easily be supplied by his master. It is rare that a Kamia starves to death as, in addition to his wages and *jalpan*, indefinite grain allowances are given to him during the working days, at each harvest, at festivals, or whenever his stock has exhausted.

The Kamia is also given from three to five *mahua* (*Bassia Latifolia*) trees, with permission to use the produce of his *Bari* land, vegetables and game from the jungle. He can also keep the income realized from the sale of crude lac and fuel-wood, which is in no way insufficient to keep the Kamia in a state of contentment. Thus the Kamia, though at the mercy of his master, is sure at least of a minimum subsistence to keep his body and soul together.

(2) The Kamia is always provided with a house, and a few Kathas of land (known as *Gharbari Land*) for cultivation during periods of unemployment. In Palamau, "the Kamia usually receives a house rent-free, about 1/6 of an acre of *Bari* Land, and possibly a small area of rice-land, called 'Palhath,' in addition."<sup>15</sup> In Hunterganj and Partabpur districts, more than one-third of the agricultural population holds *Makan-Bari* or *Naukarana-Land*, and at least nine-tenths of this popula-

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<sup>15</sup>District Gazetteer, op. cit. 130-140.

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tion are reduced to servitude. The average size of these *Makan-Bari* holdings, which constitute 8 per cent. of the total number of tenancies in Giridih and Hazaribagh Sadar, 30 per cent. in Partabpur and 24 per cent. in Hunterganj, does not exceed. .45 acres for rice-land and 1.50 acres for upland, as against 1.5 acres for rice-land and 2.70 acres for upland held by settled raiyats.<sup>16</sup> The Kamia grows poor quality of rice, *gondli* and maize with the help of his family hands, but since his land is of very poor quality, his dependence on its produce cannot go far.

When a raiyat gets a new Kamia, and has to provide him with a house and some *Makan-Bari-Land*, he either does so out of his own land or asks the landlord for a house or house site and some cultivable land for the purpose. In the former case the Kamia is clearly a Service-Jagirdar of the raiyat. In the latter case also he remains a Service-Jagirdar if the landlord settles the land in question with the raiyat. But if the landlord gives over the land direct to the Kamia only after reserving a right of calling on the services of the latter, the land is clearly not the raiyat's, and the Kamia is treated in the records as a non-agricultural tenant of the village and not given a separate *khatian*. The land in such cases appears in the *khatian* of the landlord's uncultivated land.

(3) The Kamia is assured of at least 90-120 days full-time employment on the landlord's *Khas* land, and for the rest of the time he can work on others' fields, collect fuel from the jungle for sale, or move to some mining centre in the vicinity. Since most of the Kamias are landless labourers who prefer to stay in the villages, they pledge their labour for agricultural seasons to avoid competition and to ensure employment. Thus the seasonal fluctuations in the demand for labour simultaneously in the mining industries and agriculture, secure some work, of whatever kind, for the Kamia population in most of the districts of Chota Nagpur.

(4) The Kamia has the doubtful privilege of borrowing more money for social or domestic purposes. He enjoys, however, the privilege of asking his master to get him married or make arrangements for the marriage of his sons and daughters. The expenses incurred by the landlord in this connection are considered as fresh loans to the Kamia. These additional loans are added to his bond and each time such advances are made a new hold is laid on the Kamia's existence.

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<sup>16</sup>Hazaribagh Settlement Report, op. cit. para 266.

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*Disabilities of the Kamia:* Whatever be the advantages and justification for the Kamia system in theory, it leads in practice to absolute degeneration and permanent subjection of an important section of the rural community without whom many a field will lie uncultivated, and many an agricultural operation left undone. The disabilities of the Kamia are varied and many:—

- (a) The Kamia cannot bargain about his wages. He must accept the customary dole, which is not more than the dole of food. His wages are invariably paid in grain and represent only one-third of a day's wage for free labour. They include two meals of coarse rice (*jalpan*) on working days, plus an allowance of grain, at the expiry of his contract, which does not exceed 5 seers of paddy. "If the Kamia's wife also works for his master, she receives a slightly smaller remuneration, and their joint wages are not sufficient to feed properly themselves and the normal family of children which they are certain to possess."<sup>17</sup>
- (b) The Kamia never sees any money unless it be his occasional earning in his spare time. Whatever produce he can get from the jungle is exchanged by barter. Consequently he has no chance of ever repaying the principal of his debt and of becoming a freeman. A Kamiauti bond, therefore, involves a life-sentence.
- (c) There is no provision for his regular employment and no food is supplied on the days when there is no work to be done. The master claims the Kamia's labour at a starvation wage, and when there is no agricultural work to be done on the master's field, the Kamia is left to seek employment elsewhere. If the Kamia's master has a big estate, his services may be required for grazing cattle, cutting grass and collecting fuel-wood, fencing the owner's *bari*, repairing his houses, or other such domestic duties as he may be fit to do. But the master of small and limited means, most of the Kamia owners falling in this category, assumes no responsibility to provide work at any time unless it suits his convenience to do so. As a general rule, however, an owner will not allow his Kamia to starve to death lest he should lose his services, but he will do nothing for a non-working Kamia incapacitated by want of

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<sup>17</sup>Sifton, op. cit. p. 199.

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employment, illness or old age. These disabilities, coupled with the owner's restrictions on the movement of the Kamia, constitute a grave social injustice.

- (d) The restrictions on the movement of a Kamia render him no better than a slave. An absconding Kamia can hardly find asylum anywhere in the district. In Hazaribagh, Sifton observed, that landlords as a class combine to maintain the system and return to his master any Kamia taking shelter in their villages, and in the past police have unofficially helped to track down and recover runaways. Whenever a Kamia has a family and a few Kathas of Bari-Land, he seldom prefers to abandon his wife and children. Moreover, the ill-treatment meted out to runaways is always too hard to bear. Owing to these factors, which are responsible for the suppression of emigration in the districts of Hunterganj, Simaria, Chatra and Chauparan, the Babhan and Rajput landlords have worked the Kamiauti system with an iron hand.

Even during the periods of unemployment the Kamia cannot leave his village, and this restriction in certain cases actually reduces him to earning the most miserable existence by collecting fuel and grass for sale, and wild fruits and roots for an humble meal.

- (e) The condition becomes hereditary. Where a Kamia does not execute a bond involving his wife and children, a new debt is always contracted on behalf of the son on the occasion of his marriage. It has been found that hereditary bondage, even if the Kamiauti agreement is verbal, is an implied obligation. If the Kamia dies leaving his debt unpaid, the son or the wife, or both, step into the shoes of the deceased on the same terms and conditions or on the conditions of a new bond executed at the time of such a happening.

"In Palamau out of 3,000 cases of Kamias examined it was found that 2/3 had entered into their agreements in the last ten years, ¼ between 10 and 20 years, and 1/10 between 20 and 30 years previously. Out of another group of 368 cases examined, it was found that 2/3 were the sons of Kamias."<sup>18</sup> These figures prove that the obligation once entered into is not unoften passed on to the original Kamia's children, and that labourers are still constantly being drawn to this precarious form of livelihood.

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<sup>18</sup>District Gazetteer, op. cit. p. 132.

## AGRICULTURAL LABOUR CONDITIONS IN NORTHERN INDIA

*Acquirement, Purchase and Sale of Kamias:* Whenever a Kamia runs away from his master to a suburban coal-field, he is supposed to have permanently liberated himself. If he runs away to another village or district, his idea is not of total emancipation but merely of a change of master. The growth of mining centres at Kodarma and Giridih, have much facilitated the migration of Kamias from their cruel and unsympathetic masters, and the conspicuous set-back in the population of Chauparan, Simaria, Chatra, Barhi, Gumia and Bagodar during 1911-1931 is due to bad agricultural conditions and wholesale emigration of the serf population.<sup>19</sup>

Various customs attach to the action of running away for the change of masters. In some villages the first raiyat who, seeing that a Kamia is a runaway, gives him a meal, has a right to him. In other cases he takes an advance from a willing lender and executes a *Kamiauti* bond. In the third case, he approaches the landlord either through the raiyat or directly, asking for a residence and a small plot of *Makan-Bari-Land*. In the first two cases, if his former master finds out his whereabouts, he can come and reclaim him on payment of any advance which the new master may have made. But in the other case, if the Kamia once settles down on the land of the new master, he can seldom be reclaimed unless otherwise the new master is willing to accept an exorbitantly high return price from the claiming master.

The purchase price of a new Kamia often takes the shape of the fee paid by the landlord for the purchase of a wife for the Kamia's son. The intended wife and her mother are given a few yards of cotton cloth apiece, a few cooking utensils, and a rupee or two, and the Kamia and his son, along with the rest of the family, are given a feed. The whole show does not cost the landlord more than ten or fifteen rupees.\* The new Kamia, assumes the responsibility of labouring in lieu of the interest accruing on this amount until repayment. Another form of purchase, which is by no means uncommon in the districts of Hazaribagh and Palamau, is by completely wiping off the Kamia's debt with the old master—the total amount of debt being his purchase price.

The sale of the Kamia is supposed to be derogatory. It is often the result of the landlord's uncertain economic position, which makes it difficult for him to maintain his Kamias. The Babhan mahajans

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<sup>19</sup>Hazaribagh Settlement Report, op. cit. Paras 266-273.

\*Calculations based on current local market prices of commodities prevailing in the interior villages of Chota Nagpur in 1936.

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take much pride in having a greater number of Kamias, and often as a result of this race for Kamia ownership, their sale is postponed as long as possible. To avoid certain legal restrictions and social impediments, the sale of a Kamia is supposed to be a mere transference. Sometimes this transfer depends on the Kamia, who has the option of refusing it if he does not like his new master. The transaction is, therefore, formally represented as the taking over of the debt, because it is probably understood that a higher price would be an offence under the laws concerning slavery.



## CHAPTER VIII

### FORCED LABOUR (BEGAR) AND PRAEDIAL EXACTIONS (ABWABS)

The system of personal service is a picturesque relic of the past. It was subject to great abuses, it has been gravely abused, and has now been transformed into an institution of oppression and exploitation under the sway of egoistic and selfish tendencies characteristic of modern industrial civilizations. The history and development of village communities in northern India does not throw sufficient light on the origin and growth of this pernicious institution, but there is ample evidence to prove that the custom is not an exotic to India. In ancient India, forced labour was considered to be one of the privileges of superior landlords. "From land grants it would appear that the King could bestow the right to occasional forced labour, and sometimes families of potters and other industrial classes were assigned to the grantees."<sup>1</sup>

Forced labour was a common feature of the rural economy of ancient India, and was applied not only to agricultural but to all classes of labour residing in a village. "It was usually and customarily recruited from the *Sandas* (watchmen), *Vatas* (gardeners), *Gopalas* (cowherds), *Dasas* (slaves), and *Karma-karas* (field-workers), who, when employed for the cultivation of *Sir* lands, were provided with food and clothes and a nominal sum of  $\frac{1}{4}$  panas a month. It was mostly the landless class which was connected with *Sir* lands of the landlords. The *Upavasas* cultivated lands granted to them for short periods and were obliged to accompany the village headman (*gramika*) on his rounds. The *Siravahakas* were tenants-at-will, who cultivated *Sir* lands of the landholders either for  $\frac{1}{3}$  share of produce if they met their own expenses, otherwise for  $\frac{1}{5}$  share of the produce, being furnished with food, clothes and other necessities. In the first case they composed the retinue of forced labourers, while in the latter, their position was no better than those of the serfs of mediæval England. The *Kutumbins*, *Ksetrikas*, and *Karsakas* also cultivated land sublet by big cultivators as a subsidiary means of livelihood, and were obliged to work free on the landlord's land as and when the need arose. Similarly blacksmiths,

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<sup>1</sup>Dr. Pran Nath, op. cit. p. 155.

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carpenters, artisans and other such persons, according to Manu, had to work free once a month for the estate-owner (Rajan)."<sup>2</sup>

From the accounts of various travellers in India in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, we learn that forced labour was employed not only for the cultivation of *Sir* and *Khas* lands of the landlords, but also for the performance of all and sundry domestic duties of village officials and zamindars and for public works. In the middle of the last century, Hunter found that forced labour was universally employed for the reclamation of forest lands in Kumaon, Oudh and Chota Nagpur, and without such aid the smaller landlords could not maintain their standard of living.<sup>3</sup> It was this system which gradually gave rise to serfdom, because whenever *Begar* was exacted indefinitely, the landlord had to make provision for the food and clothing of the worker, and by systematic lending of cash and kind the free labourer was caught in a trap from which there could be no escape.

The origin of most of the estates in Chota Nagpur was due to personal service, that is, Jagirs were given on condition that the Jagirdar with his followers would render personal service when required. Similarly, the Jagirdars expected the cultivators of the land, included in their Jagirs, to give them personal service in turn when required. In recent times, however, this personal service has taken the form of work on the fields, and the domination of the landlords means in practice that they have the first claim on their tenants' time, and that the most favourable occasions are utilized in ploughing, sowing or reaping, not the tenant's, but the landlord's fields, greatly to the tenant's disadvantage.

*What Begar Is:* *Begar* is the customary right of the landlords to exact, for a certain number of days, free labour from their raiyats, or in lieu of services to receive *abwabs* and *rukumats* in cash or kind. The rendering of these praedial services (*Begar*) and dues (*Rukumats*) is the necessary condition of the tenancy. Although *Begari* is in practice universal and unlimited, in the sense that the tenants are called on to work for the proprietor whenever the latter thinks fit, the claims to *Begar* actually made by the proprietors themselves are generally limited to their own requirements, therefore it appears difficult to specify how many days' labour each raiyat is bound to give. The number of days for which *Begar* is taken not only varies with individual landlords, but in the absence

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<sup>2</sup>Dr. Pran Nath, op. cit. pp 141-159.

<sup>3</sup>Statistical Account of Lohardaga (Chota Nagpur) 1872.

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of effective legislation and social control, the limits to *Begar*\* are always surpassed and services are demanded indefinitely whenever they are needed. A big zamindar of Chota Nagpur said, "I am unable to say what number of days each raiyat works for in a month or in a year. The fact is that whenever there is work, that work has to be done."<sup>4</sup> The number of days, wherever not fixed by law or commuted into cash, ranges between 3-14 days in Oudh, 15-42 days in Bihar, and 60-84 days in Chota Nagpur. There are some landlords who claim 3-5 days *Begar* annually without payment, in addition to a number of days varying from 8-10 on partial wages, and any further claim on full wages. Yet another system, most prevalent in South Bihar, is to exact 20 days *Begar* from each raiyat, but for additional work the labourer gets the afternoon meal, there being no limit to this kind of demand for labour.

*Types of Begar:* There are various forms of *Begar* prevalent in different provinces of northern India. The most common ones are briefly described below:

(I) *Beth-Begar*: Under this system a labourer is required to perform certain agricultural operations for 2-5 days, or till a particular work is finished. *Beth-Begar* is of various forms: (a) *Hal-Beth*, for ploughing the land, (b) *Kodal-Beth*, for weeding and watering, (c) *Dhan-Beth*, for harvesting the crop, (d) *Misni-Beth*, for thrashing the crop, and (e) *Morabandi-Beth*, for storing the grain.<sup>5</sup> The claim to *Begar* under this head is obviously in respect of the use and occupation of land sublet by the landlord. It is, therefore, the cultivating class of labourers whose services are required to cultivate the *Sir* or *Khas* land of their landlord. The number of days for which *Begar* is exacted is distributed well over the year, so that all operations from ploughing to harvesting may be complete without the aid of hired help.

(II) *Chakran-Begar*: Whenever certain groups of labourers hold some homesteads, built on land belonging to a landlord, and are free from paying any cash rent, they are under obligation to render 2 or 3 days' *Begar* in connection with some festivals. These homesteads, called *Bastu-Baris* in Chota Nagpur, are built on *Chakran*-holdings from which the labourers, subject to *Begar*, cannot be ejected. Such holdings containing only *Bastu-Baris* are granted to

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\*Account of a Settlement Officer, Daltonganj, Chota Nagpur, taken from Murphy's Report on the landlords' memorials addressed to the Governor of Bengal, 1911.

<sup>5</sup>B. K. Gokhale: Manbhum Settlement Report, pp. 65-69.

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village menials also, e.g. Goraits, Barbers, Dhobis, etc., for rendering secular services, but their services are distinguishable from the usual *Begar* and are not a praedial condition. *Chakran-Begar* is also used for *Bahangi* (carrying the landlord's chattels when he travels on a journey), and *Chhauni* (which is house building and repairing).

(III) *Parjauta-Begar*: Whenever the raiyats do not use or own land belonging to a zamindar, either for cultivation or for *Bastu-Baris*, they are not under obligation to render either *Beth-Begar* or *Chakran-Begar*. But, still the landlord claims that, "he has the right to compel them to work for him when he pleases, in return for the permission granted to them to reside in his village."<sup>6</sup> *Parjauta* is levied on all residents of the village whether they own land or not, but it is not taken from non-residents even though they own land in the estate. It is held, therefore, that *Parjauta Begar* is not payable in respect of the use and occupation of land, but is a tribute or tax levied by the proprietor from all residents on the estate in token of his overlordship. The claim in this case is usually limited to three days, but may be increased to not more than twelve days in times of emergency.\*

(IV) *Buha-Begar*: In return for a petty borrowing of cash for domestic purposes, or of plough and plough-cattle for tilling the land, a labourer binds himself to render free service to the lender, generally his landlord, for not less than nine days, in addition to the interest paid on his loan or the hire price paid in kind (5-7 maunds of grain), for the use of plough and plough-cattle. The *Begar* in this case is exacted in return for the privilege of borrowing and the preference given to them in making such advances. Whenever a loan has been taken by a landless labourer, and he is unable to repay the loan or the interest accruing on it, the limit to *Begar* is removed, and most often such victims are reduced to serfdom. The *Buha* system is largely responsible for the increase in the number of bond-serfs in the districts of Hazaribagh and Ranchi, because the landlords can never miss the opportunity of adding another recruit to their army of serfs.

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<sup>6</sup>B. K. Gokhale in Manbhum Settlement Report, pp. 65-69, describes these systems in greater details. Each of these types has local peculiarities in respect of terms and conditions of work.

\**Parjauta* takes the form of *Nazrana* in Bihar and Oudh and is commutable into cash.

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(V) *Dubri-Begar*: Wherever the chain of sub-infeudation has gone to grotesque lengths, the system of *Begar* has been intensified and complicated, as the labourers are obliged to please not only the inferior but also the superior landlords. Some big landlords do not enforce *Begar* from their raiyat, or have more work than can be done by a normal number of *Begar* labourers during the assigned period. In such cases the intermediate tenure holders present the *Begar* of labourers under their obligation to their superior-lords; while in other cases the local agents of these landlords claim *Begar* on their behalf. In Chota Nagpur it has become the unpleasant duty of small Jagirdars to ensure a regular supply of *Begar* for the cultivation of the *Sir* lands of their overlords. It has also been found that *Begar* is annually offered to the landlord as a "Salami" or "Nazrana", but the claim in such cases is not considerable and seldom exceeds three days labour. *Dubri-Begar* is a common feature of those regions where the big landlords exercise a dominating influence on the under tenure-holders, and specially where the raiyat is weak and ignorant.

*Effect of Begar on the Economic Condition of Smaller Landlords:* The main aim of the tenants who prosper is to become a landlord. This is due partly to a desire to obtain security of tenure; partly to the difficulties in the older and fully developed parts of either extending cultivation or buying land; and partly to use power so gained, as they have seen other landlords use it, in order to get free services from their raiyats, or cheaper labour than can be obtained in the open market, and to get a large share of profits won by the labour of others. Big zamindars command a large number of forced labourers at very low wages, but it is the inpecunious intermediate tenure-holder who tries to exact *Begar*, not so much because he gains any pecuniary advantage, but because he gets the labour when he wants it, and also because it enhances his prestige. Many of the small zamindars now subsist on land which could not possibly yield sufficient net profits to maintain them in a style befitting zamindars if they have to pay a fair wage to the agricultural worker for its cultivation. Their social system generally prohibits personal cultivation—a social system which could never have extended to such petty landlords but for the facilities of obtaining sweated labour afforded by the agrarian conditions of their district. The position of the small zamindars will become desperate if *Begar* were systematically suppressed and serfdom abolished. They will be confronted with the alternative of breaking down the record-of-rights and violating the Tenancy Laws, or of infringing their own social laws by doing useful work to justify their existence. In default of either

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they must starve. However, it is utterly impossible to justify a continuance, for any period or to any extent, of the old system which debased the whole working section of the agricultural community to the lowest degradation, in order that those just a little above them in material condition, should live a life of *otium cum dignitate*. The petty landlord must, therefore, learn to become a useful member of society, or go.

*Disabilities of Begar Workers:* The system of *Begar* presses most hardly on the raiyats who live in villages near the landlord's private land, and those who suffer most are naturally the poorest tenants who are least able to resist excessive demands. The fact that the suffering is borne in silence, is no proof that it does not tell upon the economic condition of the rural classes. The holdings of agricultural labourers are not sufficiently large or productive to supply their daily food, and the rent is so high that improvements and enlargements cannot be made, therefore, they have to cultivate their own land and supplement their income from earnings by working as agricultural labourers on others' fields. But the *Begar* system deprives them of the power of selecting their employers or choosing their own time for working for themselves.<sup>7</sup> They have thus lost the advantage which, as agricultural labourers, they might have derived from the landlords' competition for labour, and as agriculturists, they are not free to cultivate their own fields at the most suitable time. In his final report on the Settlement of District Palamau, Forbes says that, "the farmer (*thikadar*) held a large share of the best land in the village which he cultivated chiefly by forced labour. His lands had to be ploughed and sowed first, and his rice first transplanted, the raiyats had to take their chance of cultivating their own lands, and very often the time had gone by before they could get leisure to plough them."<sup>8</sup> Sifton observed that, "in Hazaribagh, a landlord will not allow sowing or transplantation or weeding to start in any raiyat's land until the operation is completed in his own lands. During the dry season he requisitions the raiyats' ploughs for his land when a fall of rain makes the ground workable, and probably the raiyat misses the opportunity of thereby ploughing his own lands."<sup>9</sup> Not only that *Begar* is exacted at the most inopportune times, but the zamindars have recently extended their practice of beat-

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<sup>7</sup>Hazaribagh Settlement Report, op. cit. p. 70.

<sup>8</sup>op. cit. p. 120.

<sup>9</sup>op. cit. p. 69.

ing up *Begar* from all the villages four or five miles around if they have large *khas* lands, and cases have occurred of old landlords, after parting with their property by sale, insisting that they have not sold the right to the raiyat's *Begar*, and that it is still due to them and not to the purchasers of the tenures.

*Commutation of Begar:* There was a growing rural discontent against the landlords in almost all parts of India before the era of British Dominion, but it was not until the outbreak of the Kols' insurrection in 1831-32 that the grievances of an oppressed raiyat were brought to light.<sup>10</sup> The antagonism between the landlords and tenants was a common feature of all provinces, and the incidence of rent charges and the system of collecting praedial dues (*Rukumats*) and services (*Begar*) were unfailing sources of dispute. The Kols complained of the heavy load of praedial exactions and unlimited *Begar* imposed by the Dikku landlords, and rose to violence the like of which has never since been witnessed. In 1886 the Mundas and Oraons of Chota Nagpur refused to meet the preposterous claims of their landlords and they were readily supported by Jesuit Missionaries.<sup>11</sup> In 1890 Sir Stuart Bayley held a conference of landlords and raiyats, and it was generally agreed that a wholesale commutation to money payments of praedial dues and services was essential to the peace and prosperity of the country. Soon after, in April 1890, Grimley issued a proclamation to the effect that the zamindars would not be permitted to exact labour from their tenants without any limit whatsoever, and at the same time he conveyed a warning to the raiyats that they were bound to render services according to custom.<sup>12</sup> In 1897 a Bill was introduced and passed in Bengal Council (Act IV of 1897) providing for the voluntary commutation of praedial conditions and services, laying down procedure for enhancement of rents, and regulating the registration and resumption of intermediate tenures. For purposes of commutation Grimley prescribed 14 days' labour within the year on the following scale:—

Three days	ploughing,
" "	digging,
" "	sowing or planting rice,
" "	cutting rice.

<sup>10</sup>Bihar and Orissa District Gazetteer, Santal Parganas, p. 51.

<sup>11</sup>Ranchi Settlement Report, op. cit. pp. 85-92.

<sup>12</sup>Palamau Settlement Report, op. cit. pp. 91-93.

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One day      threshing corn,  
                 assistance in making  
                 granaries, or carrying  
                 load for the landlord.      }

The operations carried out under the Commutation Act by the local authorities proved a failure, because *firstly*, a very small percentage of landlords and raiyats applied for commutation. Those raiyats who were on good terms with their landlords had no objection whatsoever to working off a portion of their rent liabilities in the shape of labour. *Secondly*, the value of 14 days' free *Begar* added to the rental of a small holding meant a considerable increase of rent to a majority of the cultivators. *Thirdly*, since payment in cash by landless workers was unthinkable, they preferred to meet their obligation in services. *Finally*, money payments allowed in lieu of services were sometimes greatly in excess of customary rates and the costs of proceedings acted as a serious deterrent. All *Begar*, however, was compulsorily commuted under the Chota Nagpur Tenancy Act of 1908, and neither *Begar* nor *Rukumats* can be attached to any new Tenancy created after 1908.

*Abwabs and Rukumats*: The terms *Abwabs*, *Rukumats*, and *Nazranas*, are used in the sense of illegal exactions imposed on the raiyat, in addition to the legal rent, by the agents of private proprietors. As a condition of tenancy, the raiyat has to render *begar* or pay *abwabs*, or he may be subject to both. In certain places he has the option of rendering *begar* or paying *abwabs*. These illegal cesses and impositions have the sanction of ancient custom and are paid by the tenants without any protest. Such universality of corruption in the country in the eighteenth century, at the time of Moghul rule, helped the Dewans and even the private zamindars to enhance their revenue, and more often the *abwabs* were collected with an iron hand and considered to be the first charge on the tenant.<sup>13</sup> The practice of levying *abwabs* and illegal cesses continues to prevail throughout northern India, and now it has become quite common for the zamindars to levy small imposts year after year on various pretexts and occasions, and then to assimilate the *mamuli* (nominal) subscription into rent after a period of five years. The general incidence of *abwabs* varies in practice from 3 per cent. to 120 per cent. of the legal rental, and instances have been found where it conveniently exceeds even two hundred per cent.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup>Mukerji, *op. cit.* pp. 129-130.

<sup>14</sup>Settlement Report, District Champaran, Bihar, pp. 41-49



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In the United Provinces, the *nazrana* is usually levied for admission to a tenancy, for the permission to plant a grove, for the construction of wells, and for occupying a house-site and building a house. It is more or less a manorial due exacted by the landholder, and is payable in a lump sum along with the recorded rent. The incidence of *nazranas* is greater where there is more competition for land and security for tenure is little. Throughout the province the level of non-occupancy rents is often much higher than that of occupancy rents. On account of the competition for land the non-occupancy tenants not only pay a huge share of *nazrana* on admission to tenancy, but their rents are enhanced, by a long chain of praedial imposts, to such a point, that they are left to eke out a miserable existence.

In Partabgarh, the *nazrana* amounts to 20 per cent. of the recorded rental, while in Lucknow for the lease of one bigha of land, carrying a rent of Rs. 10, the *nazrana* paid to the Zamindar, Patwari, Ziladar, etc. comes to Rs. 12.<sup>15</sup> In some of the thickly populated submontane districts of Oudh, the Zamindar charges an exorbitant *nazrana* when the peasant wants a house-site. If the peasant dies without heir or abandons the site, it reverts to the zamindar. The Government Resolution on the Revenue Administration of the United Provinces (1926) showed that although the taking of *nazrana* has decreased on the whole since the passing of the Oudh Rent Act of 1923, the practice is universal and there are also other cesses which are still exacted to a considerable extent in addition to the rent.

In Bihar, *abwabs* are realized by petty zamindars or their employees at the time of harvest. The commonest *abwabs* are *Amin-Kharcha* (dues of collectors), *Sidha* and *Kila* (payment for the weighman), *Dahiak* (a lagan of 2 seers in the maund), and *pain-kharcha* (irrigation dues). In Manbhum and Dhanbad most of the *Rukumats* are of recent imposition dating from the introduction of Durga Puja in the villages of Bengali landlords, and exceed  $\frac{1}{4}$  of the rent paid by the raiyats.<sup>16</sup> In some villages of District Champaran the average holding of the ryots is 3 bighas and the average rent per bigha is Rs. 3-10-6, but the actual incidence of rental per bigha amounts to Rs. 7-5-6, the difference being accounted for the illegal exactions.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup>Mukerjee, op. cit. p. 174.

<sup>16</sup>Manbhum Settlement Report, op. cit. Para 127, p. 66.

<sup>17</sup>Figures taken from the Survey and Settlement Operations in Ramnagar Estate, District Champaran.

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In Orissa, *Salami* (visit of zamindar), *Suniabhethi* (protection by the landlord), *Bibhachina* (marriage dues), *Tahrir* (patwari's dues), *Mangan* and *Lagan* (a forced benevolence) are the most common. A host of similar dues in the form of *nazranas*, at the time of festivals and religious ceremonies are collected throughout the year, and as many as seventy to eighty kinds of illegal cesses, specially for petty domestic requirements of Thikadars, have been counted, which amount from 50 to 200 per cent. of the rent paid per bigha.<sup>18</sup>

In Bengal, *abwabs* of anything from one to four annas in the rupee are common, and where rents are low they amount to eight annas in the rupee. In Birbhum, Murshidabad and Dacca, a rent of rupee one for every bigha of land provided with irrigation facilities is payable to the landlord, along with a cess of one anna in the rupee of rent which is distributed among the collecting staff. Most common impositions are *Punya*, *Sairat*, *Salami*, *Parbani*, *Battas* and *Kharchas* of many kinds, which alone claim a fourth of the tenant's income. More ridiculous are the exactions to defray the costs of law suits, *Sradha* and *Marcha* ceremonies in the landlord's family. In Dacca rents of Re. 1-8 have been increased to Rs. 5 or more per bigha, and in most of the districts of eastern Bengal praedial exactions are normally an intolerable burden on the tenants.<sup>19</sup>

In Chota Nagpur the system of taking *Rukumats* is most obnoxious and oppressive. In one estate a tenant was found to pay 6 different kinds of *Salamis* to the landlord, 11 different kinds of *Lagans* as gifts to the relations and employees of the Malik, and a dozen kinds of *Chandas* (contributions) and *Bhents* (offerings) for the Malik's family—gods, besides a score of dues for his domestic requirements.<sup>20</sup> The impositions on villages are in the form of *Salami-Dasehra* (Rs. 4/- a village), *Bardauchha* (one bullock or its price, Rs. 18/- to 33/- a village) *Charpai* and *Soni* (one cot with bedding for winter, Rs. 5/- a village), *Tauzi* and *Neg-Amla* (office establishment, Rs. 7/- a village), *Darmalia Thana* (police cess, Rs. 5/- a village), *Til*, *Urd* and *Makai* (2-6 maunds a village). In normal years a tenant may have to meet 30 to 50 dues, costing him Rs. 10/- to Rs. 15/-, and a dozen claims to the extent of Rs. 50/- a village. The demand for *Rukumats* is always on the increase in this province and items are claimed either as legal charges allowed by

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<sup>18</sup>W. W. Dalziel: Final Report on the Revision Settlement of Orissa, 1932.

<sup>19</sup>Thompson: Final Report on the Survey and Settlement Operations in the District of Tippera.

<sup>20</sup>Ranka Estate, Palamau Settlement Report, op. cit. p. 94.

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the State, social obligations, or emergency impositions by the Dikku landlords.

Whether *abwabs* and *rukumats* become a source of oppression or not depends on such factors as good and bad management, absentee or resident landlordism, the extent of sub-infeudation, economic condition and social status of the tenure holders, etc. In Bihar and Chota Nagpur, the Thikadar, a buffer between the landlord and the raiyat, is particularly obnoxious in the levy of irregular and illegal cesses which the zamindar is either unable or unwilling to claim for himself, and this alone is his mainstay. Wherever absentee landlordism has given rise to the growth of middlemen, the incidence of such exactions on the poor tenants has been great, and instances of wrong doing and oppression are not unusual. The system of praedial exactions is full of grave evils:—

- (1) It is unlimited and arbitrary.
- (2) It takes away the profits of the cultivators and impoverishes them.
- (3) A tenant who pays a high *Nazrana* starts his tenancy in debt or increases his cumulative debt.
- (4) It is almost always associated with *Begar*, because, the ryot under such obligations is tempted to seek the redemption from cumulative debts by rendering *Begar*.
- (5) It is cruel and obnoxious, and is realized with an iron hand. It has greatly impoverished the peasantry and reduced them into a state of serfdom. The tenants are generally so poor and ignorant that they cannot muster enough courage to sue the landlord or complain in court. They constantly acquiesce in the violation of their rights by the zamindars and their agents for fear of worse happening to them. Those who resist are systematically crushed and cornered, and ultimately brought to their knees.

A system which thus strains the relations between the landlord and the tenant, and widens the cleavage between the actual proprietors and actual tillers of the soil, must emphatically go either by Social Reform or Repressive Legislation.

## CHAPTER IX

### FOOD AND STARVATION

*Food Requirements of Agricultural Labourers:* Nutrition is the most pressing of all present day problems in rural India. Indian cultivators have yet to realize that the greatest single factor in the promotion of their industry is good health, a perfectly developed body and mind, which food alone can possibly build.

The mass of the Indian peasantry is underfed. For a considerable number among the rural population, the problem is rather one of getting enough to eat. "Either one in every three individuals must go hungry," says Prof. K. T. Shah, "or, what is much more easy, insidious and injurious, every one must cut one out of every third meal necessary to him."<sup>1</sup> Megaw estimated that in India as a whole 39 per cent. of the population could afford adequate nourishment, 41 per cent. were poorly nourished, and 20 per cent. badly nourished.<sup>2</sup> The Provincial Banking Enquiry Committee for Bengal stated that, "the peasantry of Bengal are in a very large proportion taking to a dietary on which even rats could not live for more than five weeks. Their vitality is now so undermined by inadequate diet that they cannot stand the infection of foul diseases"<sup>3</sup> Our investigations in Bihar and the central and western districts of the United Provinces have revealed startling facts which prove that the agricultural workers are debilitated and inefficient because they cannot get enough to eat even to maintain their low standards. The extremely low vitality of the mass of the peasantry is brought out with terrible emphasis during famines and epidemics. It is now high time to make provision for a balanced diet which will satisfy the physiological needs of the body by supplying normal nutrition and health to the man behind the plough.

The Royal Commission on Agriculture observed that the ryot according to European standard has a low level of nutrition, which may cause fatalism, but may fit him better for his actual task.<sup>4</sup> Indian diets have been found to be fifty to seventy per cent. deficient in

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<sup>1</sup>Wealth and Taxable Capacity of India, p. 252.

<sup>2</sup>Major-General Sir John Megaw: An Enquiry into Certain Public Health Aspects of Village Life in India, pp. 8-11.

<sup>3</sup>Z. A. Ahmed: The Agrarian Problem in India, Congress Political and Economic Studies, No. 1, 1937, p. 23.

<sup>4</sup>Evidence Vol. I. Part I, p. 157.

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nitrogen, because comparatively less animal proteins are used here than in the West. In a warm climate, an appreciably low metabolism is accompanied by a low level of protein consumption, because nitrogenous foods are consumed in Regions of Effort (cool temperate climates) where man has to perform hard physical labour both for keeping fit and healthy, and for producing enough wealth to satisfy his wants.

In tropical and sub-tropical regions the basal metabolism of agricultural labourers is much lower than that in temperate or cold climates. Thus the calories which the Indian working man's diet yields, hardly reach the level of those of the diet of European working men. Mukerjee found that the Bengalee metabolism was on the average 9 per cent. below Western standards; and Banerjee's investigations show that the basal metabolism of the peasants in the United Provinces is 7 per cent. below the English or American standards.<sup>5</sup>

It has been found that high temperature and high humidity of the atmosphere lower the basal metabolism. During the months of high temperature and humidity (June to August) work on the farms slackens to a considerable extent in the Indo-Gangetic Plains. The extremely hot months of May and June are especially fatal to outdoor labour, and here the problem of diet is not so much of more nitrogen (heat production) to outstrip heat loss, as of fats and carbo-hydrates at whose expenditure work can be more efficiently and economically performed under the summer sun.

The Indian agricultural labourer, owing to the seasonal nature of agricultural operations, has probably a greater degree of relaxation than the factory worker who labours strenuously without sufficient leisure to recoup his expenditure of energy. During the summer season, the factory labourer works under conditions akin to sweating, and subsists on a very poor diet which is just sufficient to supply enough nutrition for a man at rest.

Dr. Radhakamal Mukerjee observes that in a warm country like India an appreciably low metabolism is accompanied by a low level of protein consumption:—<sup>6</sup>

	Grammes of protein per man per day.	Calories from all sources.
1. Hard labour in Japan (Oshima):	158	5,000
2. Light " " " " " "	100	3,000
3. Moderate work in "Western Countries (Atwater):	125	3,500

<sup>5</sup>Banerjee: *Indian Journal of Medical Research*, 1931, Vol. XIX, p. 229.

<sup>6</sup>*Indian Journal of Economics*, Vol. XII, Jan. 1932, pp. 250-253.

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4. Twenty middle class families in Shantung (Adolph):	111	3,355
5. Fourteen families in York (Rowntree):	89	2,685
6. Muscular Agricultural work in the United Provinces (Mukerjee):	100	2,400
7. Artisan family in Bengal, (Mukerjee):	40	2,283

It will be noticed from the above figures that the Indian agriculturist, though at hard work, does not require more than 100 grammes of protein and consumes the smallest number of calories. Further, Chittenden's studies of the nitrogen metabolized per kilogram of body-weight, along with some researches made at the physiological laboratory of Lucknow University, afford us interesting data of comparative resistance in the foods of the labourers of various regions in India:—

1. Average European	.270
2. " " In India	.224
3. Nepalese	.420
4. Tibetans and Bhutanis	.350
5. Japanese (poor classes)	.177
6. Biharis and Eastern Bengalees	.150
7. United Provinces (Middle Classes)	.140
8. Bengalees and Oriyas	.118
9. United Provinces Factory-hands	.100
10. United Provinces Peasants	.092

Burridge, from a recent survey of peasants' diet in the United Provinces found, that it gave its caloric energy at 2,160 against 3,500 for a British labourer of 67 kilogram weight working 8 to 9 hours per day.<sup>7</sup> The low nitrogen value of diets in the United Provinces has rightly determined the caloric energy at 2,160, and with an allowance of 100-200 calories more in the case of well-to-do tenants, the standard of 2,500 calories is reached for most parts of the Gangetic plain.<sup>8</sup> These researches can easily be utilized to determine not only the number of calories considered necessary for a working diet, but also the variety of food-stuffs from which these calories can be gathered by balancing the diet in accordance with climatic conditions and physiological variations.

*Rates of Food Consumption Non-Agricultural Classes:* The quantity and variety of food consumed by an individual varies not only according to the climate under which the person is living and the work he is doing, but also in accordance with his or her age, height, weight and constitution in general. Pavy estimated that 46 ozs. of solid food (23 ozs. of dry solid matter) was necessary for just maintaining health in a person of average height and weight, under ex-

<sup>7</sup>Indian Journal of Economics, op. cit. p. 254.

<sup>8</sup>McCarrison: Manual of Indian Foods, p. 110.

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posure to a temperate climate and a moderate amount of muscular work. These 46 ozs. should contain at least 130 grams. of proteids, 84 grams. of fatty matter, 404 grams. of carbohydrates and 462 grams. of salts, of course, leaving margin for considerable variations from these standards in proportion to the constitutions of various consumers.<sup>9</sup> Atwater gives the following requirements in terms of calories according to the nature of labour:—<sup>10</sup>

Men at Hard work	4,130
" " Moderate work	3,500
" " Light work	3,100
" " Rest	2,400

These standards, according to McFadden, represent an over-estimate, and therefore the normal standard would be about 2,500 calories per day for a man of average size at moderate work.<sup>11</sup>

As the number of calories required varies with the body-weight and the degree of activity, it will be necessary to know how many calories per pound of body-weight, per day, will be used under these varying conditions. And further, as the calories are yielded by the oxidisable food-stuffs, e.g., protein, fats and carbohydrates, it will be necessary to know the proportion of these present in the food materials and the number of calories that a given amount of each will yield. The number of calories required per pound body-weight per day will be approximately as follows:—

At Rest	.. 13-14
Light Exercise	.. 16-18
Moderate "	.. 18-20
Severe "	.. 20-23

According to these calculations for a man of 150 lbs. there would be required 2,100 calories at rest and 3,450 at hard work. An average man performing moderate work in Europe consumes nearly 3,500 calories; and an average American, according to the Hoover Food Administration Report, consumes 3,424 calories per day.

But these standards are suitable for England and other Continental countries. They cannot be applied to Indian people of tropical and semi-tropical regions, where climatic conditions enable men to do with a smaller quantity of food-heat. In the light of these facts we will study the quantity of solid food consumed by the Indian labourers engaged in various occupations in some provinces of northern India.

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<sup>9</sup>F. W. Pavy: *A Treatise on Food and Dietetics*—p. 452.

<sup>10</sup>Shah and Khambata—*Wealth and Taxable capacity of India*, p. 242.

<sup>11</sup>McFadden: *Eating for Health and Strength*—p. 100.

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The peace scale of rations for Indian troops is 33 ozs. both for *atta* (cereal flour) and rice eaters, with 3,470 and 3,386 calories respectively.<sup>12</sup> The field service rations for Indian troops average 62 ozs. of solid food, because these bodies of men are presumably the pick of manhood in India and maintained in the highest degree of efficiency. On an average these persons consume a sufficiently large number of calories than those required by a man of average weight and height in the sub-tropical monsoon regions of northern India.

The daily average of food allowance to prisoners in all the provincial jails in India is 42 ozs. i.e. 41.5 solid and 0.5 liquid ounces of food.<sup>13</sup> In Bombay, C.P. and Madras, the total amount of rations from all sources does not exceed 39 ozs., whereas in the Punjab and United Provinces, it exceeds 50 ozs. But in no province, except the United Provinces, is the diet of the prisoners balanced, and the calories drawn from one main source (*atta* or rice) rather than from a variety of food articles.

In Bombay the daily consumption of cereals per adult male worker is 0.91 lb. in the lowest class and 1.53 lb. in the highest class, the average of 2,473 budgets being 1.29 lb. for cereals and 1.54 lb. (29 ozs.) for the total rations.<sup>14</sup> It is interesting to note that the free persons in an industrial centre like Bombay receive much less food per head than hard workers in the Bombay jail. It, therefore, follows that in respect of quantity of food consumed, the inmates of the jail are far better off than the society members of commercial civilization working in modern factories.<sup>15</sup>

Daily consumption per adult male of.	Average of 2,473 budgets.	Allowance for hard labour in jail.
Cereals	1.29 lb.	1.50 lb.
Pulses	.09	.27
Beef and mutton	.03	.04
Salt	.04	.03
Oils	.02	.03
Other (Sugar, tea, milk, etc.)	.07	—
Average	1.54	1.87

**Rates of Food Consumption (Agricultural Classes):** The number and character of meals taken in rural areas varies in accordance

<sup>12</sup>Barry: Rates of Food Consumption by Zamindars, 1925, Board of Economic Enquiry Publication No. 6, Punjab.

<sup>13</sup>Shah and Khambata, op. cit. p. 244.

<sup>14</sup>Shirras—"Bombay Working Class Budgets"—pp. 19-20.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid. p. 20. N. B. (The average expenditure on food is 56.3 per cent. of the average family income in the working classes).



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with the seasons of the year. The landowners and well-to-do cultivators have usually three meals a day all round the year, but the poor class cultivators and landless labourers can at the most afford two meals a day. More palatable food is taken during the summer, but more heavy and sustaining food is consumed during the cold weather.

In the Punjab it has been estimated that a non-agricultural adult consumes 2,032 large calories and an agricultural adult male 2,709 large calories for hard work.<sup>16</sup> Major Hughes<sup>17</sup> has estimated that for moderate work 20 ozs. of wheat per day would be sufficient for a man weighing 9 stones, and 27 ozs. for a man weighing 11 stones. For heavier work more energy would of course be required. Some diets yield 3,500 to 4,000 calories when the population consumes articles of non-cereal energy, and therefore Barry's estimates require a little extra addition of calories as he has deliberately left out of account *ghi*, *lassi*, *gur*, pickles and spices, so commonly consumed by the agricultural classes all over the Punjab.

The rate of grain ration for men in the Punjab has been calculated by various authorities quoted below:—

Authority	Ounces per diem
I. Professor Steward's average for: <sup>18</sup>	
(a) Farm Beldar	.. 26.6
(b) Field Worker	.. 24.6
II. Barry's Average: <sup>19</sup>	
(a) A non-zamindar male	.. 20.0
(b) A zamindar male	.. 26.6
III. Anchal Das' estimate for well-to-do landowners in Jullunder: <sup>20</sup>	.. 25.0
IV. Gian Singh and King's average <sup>21</sup> for a:—	
(a) Well-to-do Jat-Sikh in Amritsar District.	.. 32.0
(b) Field Labourer in hard work.	.. 28.0
V. Dr. Lucas' average for all Agricultural classes. <sup>22</sup>	.. 20.6
Average	.. 25.4

<sup>16</sup>Barry, op. cit. p. 5.

<sup>17</sup>Professor of Physiology, Medical College, Lahore—1925.

<sup>18</sup>Barry: op. cit. p. 2 (Quoted).

<sup>19</sup>Ibid, Introduction by H. Calvert, p. (VII).

<sup>20</sup>Survey of Village Tehong, District Jullunder, Punjab, 1931.

<sup>21</sup>Survey of Village Gaggar Bhanna in District Amritsar, Punjab,

1928, p. 182.

<sup>22</sup>Economic Life of a Punjab Village, p. 111.

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The basal requirement of diet for an adult is about 15 calories per lb. body-weight to maintain essential vital activities alone. Therefore, Barry's calculation of 20 ozs. (2,032 large calories) for a non-zamindar male is too small to be taken as a standard for the Punjab, where the average weight of an adult exceeds ten stones. The standard diet of 26.6 ozs. (2,709 large calories) for a zamindar male ought to have been a general standard for the hard-working agricultural population. On the other hand, Barry did not take into account certain articles of diet which give non-cereal energy, hence an understatement of facts. Similarly understated are the figures of Lucas and Steward. The only reasonable figures are those of Gian Singh and King, with an average of 31 ozs. of wheat consumption and 47 ozs. of total rations, yielding between 3,500 and 4,000 calories.<sup>23</sup>

Barry in his calculations had taken *bajra* (sorghum) as equivalent to wheat, and Kitchen, in the Settlement Report of Gujar Khan Tahsil (Punjab), took gram and wheat mixed equivalent to wheat flour alone. It, therefore, follows that the proportion of protein, fat and carbohydrates will not be accurate and the number of calories will either be over-stated or under-estimated.

It is admitted by the consumers of these grains, that wheat, *bajra* and gram have their separate sustaining values. Wheat does not form the food of many cultivators in most of the districts of the United Provinces, where *Marua* and *Bijhra* flour (a mixture of all cereals) is most commonly consumed. According to the Jail Manual (Para 921), 24 ozs. of *bajra* are equivalent to 20 ozs. of wheat, but the villagers maintain that *bajra* has a greater food value (though not the same ease of digestibility) than wheat.

A comparative table of food-units in various cereals is given below:<sup>24</sup>

Cereals	Moisture	Ash	Fat	Fibre	Protein	Soluble Carbo-hydrates	Food-Units
Barley	8.25	2.59	0.85 <sup>t</sup>	6.50	8.00	73.81	95.9
Wheat	10.51	1.51	0.86	2.68	8.00	76.44	98.6
Maize	11.98	2.45	4.49	1.03	7.37	72.58	102.2
<i>Bajra</i>	14.30	2.58	5.16	1.34	8.75	67.87	102.7
Gram	7.44	3.79	3.60	10.26	17.00	57.91	109.4

<sup>23</sup>op. cit., pp. 183-190.

<sup>24</sup>S. Jagat Singh, Agricultural Chemist to the Government of the Punjab, quoted by Barry, op. cit. Appendix B.

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Gram and barley are slightly hard to digest owing to their high fibre content, but are considered most useful for hard agricultural labour. Gram, owing to its high protein content, is the most sustaining food, and therefore consumed in far lesser quantities (at any one time), than cereals. But a mixture of wheat with *bajra*, maize or barley, specially when wheat is the predominating grain, makes the diet both balanced and sustaining, and the nature of protein more significant.

In the submontane districts of Oudh (Gonda, Bahraich, Kheri and Pilibhit), the most common *atta* consumed by all agricultural classes is that of maize from September to November, *bajra* from November to February, and *bijhra* for the rest of the year. Similarly in the Punjab, the average cultivator consumes wheat for 3 months and maize for 4 months in the year. In the United Provinces the proportion of different cereal grains in *bijhra* (i. e. wheat, gram, barley, and peas) is 1:4:4:1 respectively, which makes the flour very palatable. But, since most of calories are derived from this source alone, the diet is ill-balanced and less nutritive. In the case of small tenants and field-labourers, the quantity of wheat diminishes considerably and other cereals are accordingly substituted. These agricultural labourers cannot afford to take more than two meals a day, and therefore, the total quantity of food consumed by them is not more than eighty per cent. of the food consumed by well-to-do landowners. It is usually *ghee*, milk, green vegetables, pickles and condiments which begin to disappear as one proceeds downwards on the agricultural scale.

In the United Provinces the rates of food consumption differ from region to region. The dietary combinations in the submontane districts (i. e. Gorakhpur, Basti, Gonda, Bahraich, and Kheri), differ entirely from those of the dry and semi-arid regions of the South-West (i. e. Agra, Jhansi and Aligarh). Our investigations are based on the findings in two typical districts of these regions, viz. Bahraich and Agra. In the *terai* regions of Oudh the chief diet of the agriculturists of all classes is rice. For four months in the year maize, gram and *bajra* are also used. *Dal* is the chief accompaniment, but milk and vegetables are consumed only by high class tenants. The chief diet of the majority, therefore, consists of "*Dal-Bhat*"<sup>25</sup> which is occasionally relished with vegetables and supplemented with seasonal fruits, such as cucumbers, water-melons, melons, guavas, and mangoes. Below are given two statements showing the diet of (a) a well-to-do owner-cultivator, and (b) a landless field worker, in village Sheikhdhir, District Bahraich, U. P.

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<sup>25</sup>"Dal-Bhat" is a mixture of Rice and Dal, cooked separately.

# FOOD AND STARVATION

(a)

Food-stuffs	Ounces consumed per diem	Calories
Home-pounded rice	16	1584
<i>Dal</i>	2	200
<i>Vegetables</i>	8	128
Milk	8	144
Vegetable oil	1	252
Gur or raw sugar	2	200
	37	2508
Less 10 per cent. for waste .....		251
	Total	2,257

This diet is too poor in animal protein and animal fat, too rich in carbohydrates. It is also very poor in minerals which can be added by consuming a few ounces of *atta* every day.

(b)

Food-stuffs	Amount in ounces	Calories
Home-pounded rice	21	2,373
<i>Dal</i>	2	200
Vegetable oil	1	252
Vegetables	2	32
	26	2,857
Less 10 per cent. for waste .....		286
	Total	2,571

This diet contains too little protein, all of which is of vegetable origin, far too little fat, and much of carbohydrate. It is also deficient in animal protein and fat, and dangerously low in all the vitamins, especially A and B. The deficiency of salts, notably calcium, phosphorus, and iron, is responsible for making the consumers of this diet low in vitality and incapable of sustained hard work.

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The diet of the Tharus<sup>26</sup> (small tenants and agricultural labourers) consists of 16 ozs. of home-pounded rice and 2 ozs. of *dal*; making a total of 18 ozs. per diem, yielding only 1,982 calories, which is responsible for making this race puny, incapacitated, and prone to bowel diseases which account for more than thirty per cent. of the total mortality of this class.

Thus we find, that the diet in the *Tarai* regions of the United Provinces is not only smaller in quantity, but considerably deficient in necessary proteins and fats which go to make a healthy population. It is because of the smaller resistance provided by the diets in these regions, that the people are susceptible to various diseases, and make a class of agricultural labourers who are unfit for any sustained economic effort, and profitable enterprise.

In some villages of the Allahabad District, Jafri found that the consumption of food per day by all classes of agriculturists is 48 ozs. of flour, 4 ozs. of *dal*, 2 ozs. of oil and 2 ozs. of *gur*, making a total of 56 ozs.<sup>27</sup> This gives a total of 5,000 calories. But these figures arrived at by Jafri cannot be taken as normal standard rates for the whole year. The quantity of food consumed varies with seasons. For instance, *gur* is not consumed every day if *dal* or vegetables are used by the commoner classes. Neither is it possible for an average agricultural labourer to consume 48 oz. of *atta* every day throughout the year, and irrespective of the nature of work performed. Therefore, either these figures are an over-statement of facts, or the period under investigation has been narrowed down only to one particular season, most probably the winter. Moreover, Allahabad is a wet district of the eastern United Provinces, and the people there do not depend entirely on the cereal diet. During the summer season, i. e. from March to September, a majority of people subsists on rice, *dal* and vegetables supplemented by *atta*, because the former combination is not only cheaper, but more suitable to the climatic requirements of that district.

In village Barhan, of the Agra District, the total quantity of food

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<sup>26</sup>A semi-primitive agricultural tribe inhabiting the submontane tracts of Gonda, Bahraich and Basti (Oudh).

<sup>27</sup>Jafri: *History and Status of Landlords and Tenants in the United Provinces*—pp. 213-214.

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consumed per diem by four most important sections of the rural community is as follows:—<sup>28</sup>

Group I.	Well-to-do tenants:—	41	ozs.
Group II.	Poor class tenants:—	33	"
Group III.	Chamar landless labourers: —	26	"
Group IV.	Artisans (partially agriculturists):—	30	"

The average rate of food consumed by these agricultural classes comes to 32.5 ozs. with 2,394 calories per head. This cannot be said to be sufficient in the light of the Punjab standards. Further, the agricultural workers, who perform hard manual labour, receive not only a much smaller quantity of food, but also less nutritious, which is weak in protein content.

For Bengal, the Famine Commission recommended  $\frac{3}{4}$  of a seer ( $1\frac{1}{2}$  lb.) per head of husked rice for daily subsistence, as the amount required to keep a family of the cultivating classes physically fit. But Jack found that in Faridpur 6 maunds of rice was consumed per head per annum in families living in extreme indigence as against 12 maunds per head of those living in comfort. Moreover the families in comfort supplemented their diets with fish, vegetables and milk, articles which were not much known to the families in extreme indigence—hence malnutrition. They do not receive sufficient nourishment to maintain their bodies at the greatest strength of which they are capable, although they get sufficient nourishment to keep them going.<sup>29</sup>

In southern Gujrat villages, the usual daily diet consists of three varieties of grain—viz. Rice, *Nagli* and *Wal*. This ration is supplemented with milk, vegetables and ghee in the case of well-to-do cultivators and zamindars. Generally, the quality of the varieties of grain used is inferior because of the poverty of the agricultural population. In village Atgam, the daily ration per adult is 15.2 ozs.

28		Total food (ozs.)	Atta	Dal	Vegetables	Milk	Ghee or oil	Gur	Total Calories.
Group	I.	41	18	2	6	12	2	1	2,678
"	II.	33	20	2	4	6	1	—	2,664
"	III.	26	20	3	2	—	1	—	2,624
"	IV.	30	18	2	4	8	2	2	2,675
Average		32.5	19	2.2	4	6.5	1.5	0.75	2,660
Less 10 per cent. for waste									266
Total									2,394

<sup>29</sup>Jack: *The Economic Life of a Bengal District*. p. 66.

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of paddy (60% of husked rice), 13.6 ozs. of Nagli and 5.4 ozs. of Wal, which supply 2.92 ozs. of protein, 0.33 ozs. of fat and 25.58 ozs. of starch, which is far below the average for hard field-work.<sup>30</sup> It was, therefore, calculated by Mukhtyar that, "the average daily ration of the average Kaliparaj adult of Atgam is deficient in proteins, the most important human food for replenishing the worn-out tissues. There is chronic malnutrition."<sup>31</sup>

Ranga's investigations in South Indian villages disclosed that 18 ozs. of cereals were the minimum needed to keep an adult in a ryot's family in proper working condition. The Panchamas, both men and women, who are arduous workers, need much more solid food, but five out of nine families suffer from serious under-consumption of cereals, whereas only one out of five Sudra families fares so badly. The average consumption per adult per day is as follows:—

	Total Solid Food (ozs.)	Cereals (Rice)	Pulses	Meat or Fish	Ghee or Oil
1. Average					
Panchama	19.8	18.8	0.2	0.4	.
2. Average Sudra	22.2	20.1	1.2	0.7	.
3. Average Ryot of Deltaic Villages:	22.8	19.2	2.3	0.1	1.1
4. Average Ryots of Three villages of Dry Districts:	21.3	19.6	1.1	.	0.5

Panchamas have usually three meals a day, if they can get them. During the rainy season, most of them are unable to get the afternoon meal, and many have to be satisfied with only half a meal in the evening. Most Panchamas are unable to eat fruits, butter-milk, milk or ghee. Their curries are least nutritious (made of a thin solution of tamarind, a good bit of inferior chilly powder, onions, one or two vegetables and unclean salt). Little *Dal* is consumed which really balances the malnutrition of rice eating people. In most cases although the food is voluminous, it has very little nutrition and vitamin.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>30</sup>The standard according to Church's investigations should be 3.64 ozs. of protein, 2.50 ozs. of fat and 16.95 ozs. of starch.

<sup>31</sup>Mukhtyar: *Life and Labour in a South Gujrat Village*, p. 303.

<sup>32</sup>N. G. Ranga: *Economic Organisation of South Indian Villages*, 1926, Vol. I, pp. 17 and 18.

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*The Diet of Agricultural Serfs:* The quantity and variety of food consumed by the Kamias of Chota Nagpur is limited. Most of them consume boiled rice and vegetables or *dal* once a day. *Dal* for them is a luxury and is enjoyed by the rich only, but the poorer classes make a good use of various wild plants and leaves for their vegetable curry—e.g. Mu-'a, Bor-'a, Jait-'a, and leaves of Munga-Singa (*Kanair*), Hesa (*Peepal*) and Joio (*Imli*). During the rains and in winter, the Kamia's *Bakai* (homestead garden) supplies him with vegetables such as beans, gourds, pumpkins, brinjals, and cucumbers. The Hos and Oraons eat flesh of all birds and animals and would not spare even the flesh of dead animals. The Mundas supplement their diet with pulses and Diang (rice beer). The Diang is prepared with boiled rice by the addition of some intoxicating drugs and fermentation, and is supposed to be the staple food of old men and women who subsist chiefly on this drink.<sup>33</sup>

The entire Kamia population of Chota Nagpur, consisting of Mundas, Oraons, Birhours, Hos, Dusadhs and other low castes, lives in extreme poverty and gets only one meal a day. It is usually the dole of food given by the master—after the whole day's labour. During the day they subsist on *mowra* flowers, wild roots and fruits. In Palamau the quantity is 16 to 20 ozs. of cooked coarse rice and 2-4 ozs. of *dal* or vegetables. No flour is consumed. The only substitute for this food is parched gram 10-12 ozs. with salt and chillies, and 4 ozs. of dried *mowra* flowers. In Hazaribagh the Kamia gets two handfuls of parched gram or *mahua*\* for breakfast, and one meal of 16-24 ozs. of cooked rice and *dal* in the evening. In Ranchi the Kamia gets usually two meals and a few pice to enjoy Diang in the evening. In the Gogra tracts of Oudh, the Sewak receives two meals of cooked rice and vegetables or parched gram or Sattu in the afternoon, and cooked rice or boiled Jowar (*Jundri Bhat*) or Bijhra bread and Dal in the evening. While in North Bihar, the Baramasia receives parched barley and gram and gur in the afternoon, and boiled rice or maize with or without *dal* in the evening.

It will be noticed that almost in all cases rice and *dal* are the staple food of the agricultural serfs, substituted for occasionally by parched gram, boiled maize or bread of mixed cereals. Wherever the Kamia gets only one meal, he subsists on *mowra* flowers or wild fruits, otherwise he starves. In no case, however, a Kamia ever gets *ghee*, milk, oil, fish, *gur*, pickles or condiments. The rate of

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<sup>33</sup>Singhbhum Settlement Report, op. cit. p. 121.

\*'Mowra' or 'Mahua' are edible flowers of a deciduous tree.



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food consumption for Kamias in Bihar and Chota Nagpur is as follows:—

Food-stuffs	Ozs. per diem	Calories.
Home-pounded rice	16	1,584
<i>Dal</i>	2	200
Vegetables	4	64
	22	1,848

When this diet is supplemented with fruits and *mowra* flowers, the calories consumed amount to about 2,000. In the submontane districts of Oudh the diet of Sewaks is as follows:—

Food-stuffs	Ozs. per diem	Calories.
Home-pounded rice	18	1,785
<i>Dal</i>	2	200
Vegetables (leafy)	4	40
	24	2,025
<i>Atta</i> (all grains mixed)	18	1,832
<i>Dal</i>	4	400
Vegetables (leafy)	—	—
	22	2,232

Thus we find that the agricultural serf is not only poorly fed but positively underfed. In the rice-eating districts the average daily consumption of solid food is 23 ozs., yielding 1,936 calories, while in the other districts it is 22 ozs., yielding 2,232 calories. These allowances are far short of the optimum quantity required by male adult workers, and are a sufficient proof of the feeble physical standard and the poor efficiency of the agricultural serfs.

*Defects of Dietary in Rural India:* The faults of Indian diets lie in their ill-balanced composition. In all the provinces of northern India emphasis is laid on *atta* or rice as the staple article of diet without giving sufficient place to other articles of food which provide a sufficiency of suitable protein. In the Punjab and the United Provinces the unchanging combination is *atta* (of wheat, *juar*, or *bajra*) and *dal*; whereas in Bihar, Orissa and Bengal, it is rice and vegetables or *dal*. In each case more than three-fourths of the total quantity of food consumed by all the agricultural classes consists of these two articles only.

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Wheat flour has better proteins than most other grains, but is deficient in vitamins A, C and D, which must be made good by consuming milk, green vegetables and meat. It is also deficient in certain mineral elements, particularly calcium, sodium, and chlorine. "The combination of wheat flour with fruits, milk and green leafy vegetables will not supply the necessary minerals to the body, but the non-irritating vegetable matter will help the action of the bowels, and the acid-producing tendency of the *atta* will be counteracted by the alkali-producing tendency of the vegetables and fruits."<sup>34</sup>

Most of the races of North India are wheat-eating, specially those of the Frontier and the Punjab, and are therefore better developed physically and more capable of endurance and hard work. Wherever the whole wheat flour (*atta*) is the staple article of diet, it must be supplemented by a sufficient quantity of milk, *ghee*, *dal*, green vegetables and occasionally with fish or meat. This will make good the deficiency of wheat *atta* in fats, suitable proteins and vitamins.

Unlike the Punjab, the staple article of diet in most parts of the United Provinces is millet (*ragi* or *bajra*), maize, barley, *chola*, and *cumbu*. Sometimes one single grain is consumed in the form of *roti* (unleavened bread), but generally, two or more are mixed up. The defects of these cereal grains are similar to wheat. When these grains are eaten after being ground into meal, they contain plenty of vitamin B, but too little vitamin A, and absolutely no vitamin C or D. They are also poor in mineral salts and more deficient in calcium than wheat or whole rice. They lack the necessary vegetable residue to help the action of the bowels.

In the *Tarai* tracts of the United Provinces, more than ninety per cent. of agriculturists consume maize, rice and *bijhra* (mixture of barley, gram and peas). In the central and eastern districts wheat, rice and maize with *bajra* and gram are consumed. And in the southern and south-western districts the staple article of food is *bajra*, maize, barley and gram. Wheat and rice, therefore, form only an insignificant proportion of the dietary in the *United Provinces*. Most of these coarse cereals are deficient in fats, proteins and mineral salts, and cannot be depended upon for giving the physical efficiency, vigour, capacity for hard work, and health to the labouring classes unless these defects are corrected by a system of balanced diets.

In northern Bihar, Chota Nagpur, Orissa and Bengal, the staple article of diet is rice. Whichever rice is used, it contains enough

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<sup>34</sup>Robert McCarrison, op. cit. p. 95.

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carbohydrates but is very deficient in the quantity as well as the quality of proteins. Wheat has twice as much proteins as rice. Rice does not contain enough fats, and too little vitamin B, this deficiency being greater when rice is milled and polished or parboiled and much washed. Rice-eating people are generally under-developed and less capable for muscular work, than wheat or *bajra* consumers.

In Bihar and Bengal the defects of rice have not been made good by eating a variety of cereals and vegetables, therefore, the peasantry has remained weak and lethargic. Wherever, in these provinces, rice is the sole, or the main, source of food, people suffer from *beri-beri*. It has been found that constipation and the acidity of blood are also common among rice-eating races, because rice is very poor in calcium, phosphorus, potassium, sodium, etc. It is for these reasons that rice alone is a very poor grain on which to rely and under any circumstances it should not dominate the diet of agricultural classes, unless it is supplemented with milk, *dal*, green leafy vegetables, *ghee* and some *atta* every day if one can afford to do so.

The second most important article of general consumption all over northern India is *pulses*. The use of *pulses* (*Arhar*, *Masur*, *Urid*, *Mungh*, etc.) is more common in the villages of the Punjab and the United Provinces than in Bihar, Orissa and Bengal. Pulses contain about twice as much protein as wheat, and four times as much as polished rice. Their proteins are better than those of the cereal grains, though not so good as those of milk and meat, however, they help to make up for the defects in the proteins of cereal grains and are a very good addition to the rice-eater's and wheat eater's diets.

Pulses cannot be digested in large quantities (more than 4 or 5 ounces a day) without doing harm to the digestive organs, because of their excessive protein content. An ounce of *dal* has as much protein as one ounce of meat, twice as much as one ounce of egg, and seven times as much as one ounce of whole milk.<sup>35</sup> But the proteins of *dals* are of "less suitable" kind while those of the animal's foods are of the "suitable" kind. Although *dals* are rich in iron and phosphorus, they are poor in calcium, sodium and chlorine. They contain very little vitamin A and no vitamin C, unless they are left to sprout in water before consumption. Therefore, *dals* should not be taken as the only sources of proteins, but animal foods should be supplemented to make up for the poorer quality of the proteins in the cereal grains which form the bulk of the food.

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<sup>35</sup>McCarrison, op. cit. p. 101.

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One of the greatest of the food difficulties in India is to secure a sufficient amount of vitamin A, because the food-stuffs which contain most of this vitamin e.g. eggs, roe-fish or fish oil and leafy vegetables are not consumed by a majority of the rural population. In villages, for the most part of the year, cows and other milch cattle are fed on food that is not green, i.e. dried and parched grass, or dried stems of *bajra* and wheat plants. Therefore, their milk contains very little of this vitamin. McCarrison observes that "the high infantile mortality in India is due to mothers not eating the right kind of food containing plenty of vitamin A."

The bulk of the rural population depends on a vegetarian diet. The reasons are both religious and economic. Meat is rich in "suitable" proteins and makes up the deficiencies in the protein fragments of the cereal grains. Liver is very rich in fats and carbohydrates and also in vitamins A, B, C and D. It contains manganese and iron which are necessary for stimulating growth and for the proper composition of the blood. Similarly eggs are the most valuable food of animal origin next to milk and liver. Eggs being rich in fats, calcium, phosphorus and iron, are good substitutes for milk. It is a pity that the people in India cannot make use of these animal foods which provide valuable elements of nutrition.

The diet of eastern Bengalees is made nourishing by the addition of a good quantity of fish with rice and vegetables. Very little *dal* and no *atta* is consumed here. Fish is rich in vitamins A and D, and also in iodine and copper, but it is an acid-forming food. Whenever fish diet is not balanced with plenty of vegetables and fruits, the blood and body-fluids do not remain of the right reaction. People, therefore, suffer from scurvy, anaemia, rickets, thin bones, poor appetite and bad digestion.

Lastly we find that vegetable oils and *ghee* are articles of universal consumption. Vegetable oils are very inferior in vitamin A, and when they are hardened into *ghee*, they contain none at all. Mustard and gingelly oils are commonly consumed, but they contain only 28 grammes of fats, but no proteins, no carbohydrates and none of the vitamins. To supply the vitamins lacking in vegetable oils it is, therefore, essential to include animal fats, fish oil and butter.

Thus we find that most of the diets consumed in northern India are faulty, either because certain valuable dietary combinations are not allowed by religion, or because the people are so poor that they cannot afford to consume more than a small quantity of coarse cereals or rice with *dal*. A lack of proper combination, that is, of a judicious proportion of cereals with vegetable and animal food-stuffs, is largely responsible for these defects in rural dietary.

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*A Well Balanced Optimum Diet for Northern Regions:* The various food-stuffs eaten by the agriculturists differ in their power to produce energy-value—i. e. the fats, the carbohydrates, and spare proteins. These proteins and fats should not be derived from any one particular source, as is the case in most parts of the United Provinces, Bihar and Chota Nagpur, where the whole rural population depends mostly on coarse cereals or rice taken with *dals*. There must always be a proportion of *atta* to milk, vegetables, *dals* and animal fats and meat or fish. This proportionate mixture is necessary not only to give mineral salts, and vitamins in abundance, but also to supply enough cellulose for the proper action of the bowels.

In the Punjab, no doubt, the diet of the agricultural classes is more balanced than in any other part of India, although variety is also found in Bengal. The following statement of food consumed by the agricultural classes in Gaggar Bhanna (Punjab) will be sufficient to show how the diet can be balanced by consuming a variety of articles:—<sup>36</sup>

Rate per adult (in ounces)

	Jat-Sikh	Arain	Julaha
Wheat flour	28.0	38.4	32.0
Pulses	3.8	2.2	2.2
Vegetables	4.0	5.4	7.0
Milk, <i>ghee</i> , etc.	19.2	2.8	2.0
<i>Gur</i> or Sugar	2.0	—	—
Salt, condiments, etc.	1.5	1.0	0.5
Average	58.5	49.8	43.7

The Jat-Sikh worker is not only well fed, but derives his nourishment proportionately from vegetables and milk products. In the case of the Arain and Julaha workers, although the consumption of milk and *ghee* is very small, and *gur* negligible, the quantity of vegetables has considerably increased. In Village Tehong (Jullundur District) Anchal Das calculated the rate of food consumption by well-to-do landowners (per month of 30 days) which shows the variety of sources from which the calories are drawn.<sup>37</sup>

<sup>36</sup>Gian Singh and King: *Economic Survey of Village Gaggar-Bhanna*—pp 182-190.

<sup>37</sup>Anchal Das: *Survey of Village Tehong*, 1931.

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Age-group	Total solid food (ozs.)	Cereals	Ghee	Pulses	Gur	Total per day (ozs.)
15 — 25	916	660	80	80	96	30.5
25 — 55	1,070	840	64	80	96	35.7
Average of all agcs.	993	750	72	80	96	33.1
Average calories	27,269	76,500	14,976	8,000	9,600	3,636

In the United Provinces and Bihar the well-to-do tenants consume not only good-quality food-stuffs, but draw their calories from a variety of sources. The high caste well-to-do cultivators in the district of Agra returned the following varieties of food consumed per head per day, although such families are few and the budgets cannot be taken as standard for the district:—

Food consumed	Brahmin	Thakur
1. Wheat <i>atta</i>	18	18
2. <i>Dal</i>	2	2
3. Leafy vegetables	4	3
4. Root vegetables or Fruits	2	3
5. Milk and milk products	16	12
6. <i>Ghee</i> or oil	3	2
7. <i>Gur</i> or Sweets	2	1
8. Condiments, pickles, etc.	1	1
Total Food consumed (ozs.)	48	42

In choosing food-stuffs, in order to provide the necessary number of calories, we must be careful to avoid an excess of *atta* or rice and pulses. The required calories must be gathered proportionately from cereals, vegetables and animal food, otherwise the defects of dietary cannot be removed. In northern India an average agricultural labourer requires 90-100 grammes of proteins (360-400 calories), 80-90 grammes of fats (720-810 calories) and 360-450 grammes of carbohydrates (1,440-1,800 calories), or a total of 2,520 to 3,010 calories. On the basis of this standard a balanced diet for northern India must contain the following varieties:—<sup>38</sup>

<sup>38</sup>Calories calculated from McCarrison's Chart in the Manual of Food, pp. 111-116.

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	Food-stuffs	Amount in ounces.	Calories.
Regular:	<i>Atta</i>	12	1,222
	Rice	6	595
	Milk	20	360
	<i>Ghee</i>	2	312
	Vegetables	10	160
	Vegetable oil	1	252
	<i>Dal</i>	2	200
		53	3,101
Occasional:	Meat (mutton)	2	84
	Fresh fruits (Mangoes or guavas)	2	35
	Total:	57	3,220
Less 10 per cent. for waste:—			322
			2,878

For poor class labourers who cannot afford to take milk, *ghee*, meat and fruits regularly, though well-to-do tenants can easily do so, the following balanced dietary will be useful:—

	Food-stuffs	Amount in ounces.	Calories.
	<i>Atta</i>	14	1,428
	Rice	6	595
	<i>Dal</i>	4	400
	Root vegetables	4	64
	Leafy vegetables	4	40
	Vegetable oil	2	504
	Total	36	3,031
Less 10 per cent. for waste:—			303
			2,728

## FOOD AND STARVATION

Thus the standards of 2,878 and 2,728 calories net is an average for the Central Gangetic Plains. For the Punjab and the Frontier Provinces 20 per cent. more should be added to this standard and for Bihar, Orissa and Eastern Bengal 10 per cent. less, to bring these standards to an equilibrium of physical efficiency. It will no doubt vary from province to province and with different races according to their physique and the nature of work performed. Also that it will vary with different seasons:—

	Average Total Calories.	Summer (March-Sept.)	Winter (Oct.-Feb.)
1. Well-to-do tenants in the Punjab:—	3,500	3,000	4,000
2. Well-to-do tenants in the United Provinces and Bihar:—	3,000	2,500	3,500
3. Average agricultural worker in the Central Gangetic Plains:—	2,800	2,600	3,000
4. Average cultivator in Orissa and the Eastern Bengal:—	2,700	2,600	2,800

The rural districts of the N.-W. Frontier, the Punjab, and the Western United Provinces are inhabited by wheat-eating races, whereas the Eastern United Provinces, Bihar, Orissa and Bengal are inhabited by purely rice-eating population. These contrasting diets are greatly due to climatic and agricultural contrasts of these regions. But, in any case, vegetable protein should be made up from more than one source, as from a mixture of *atta*, rice and *dal*, rather than from one of these alone. In order that the diet be wholesome and well-balanced to suit any regional conditions in northern India, not less than one-third of the protein and one-half of the fats should be derived from animal sources, or milk-products and vegetables in purely vegetarian diets. In both cases the quantity of vegetables should be more than four times as great by weight as the amount of non-cereal food-stuffs. When it is necessary to increase the energy-value of the diet, so as to provide for hard labour and unusual activity, the amount of starch and sugars should be increased. Thus we arrive at the rule that, a balanced diet, for maintaining the most vigorous health and well-being should be made up mainly of natural food-stuffs which contain an abundance of all vitamins.



## CHAPTER X

### HOUSING AND STANDARD OF LIVING

*The Changing Concept of Standard of Living:* The economic status of any social group is determined by the amount of wealth and sources of income, social position, and the mode of living. This economic measure to a great extent determines the standard of living, a term which describes the manner and quantity in which economic goods are consumed. The mode of living in any country depends primarily on the fundamental factors of food, shelter and clothing, and an individual's power to acquire them. But this standard varies with countries owing to the physiography of various regions, racial characteristics of the people, and differing values of money. In the same country we may find different standards due to occupational variations, social stratification, and environment of life. Thus in India each province with its peculiar regional and social characteristics maintains a certain standard of living which is both peculiar to, and incomparable with, the others.

There are more forces than one which control and regulate the mode of living of any social group in a country. Since a society undergoes modification with every change in economic, social and political life, the standard of living of the people must necessarily be affected with each such modification. The concept of "standard of living" has, therefore, been elaborated by many economists, and now in its wider sense has become tinged with various social and psychological factors. The normal standard, therefore, governed by an average income is one which conduces to healthy and symmetrical development, physical efficiency and mental and moral growth of a person. That measure of necessities and scale of comfort which a person has come to regard as indispensable to his happiness, and to secure which he will make any reasonable sacrifice, is the true standard.

*Rural vs. Urban Standard:* The average wealth and income of the agricultural class is for the most part lower than that of the urban class. It is more evenly distributed and there are not in it the great town contrasts of exceedingly rich and exceedingly poor individuals:—

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- (a) The farm cash income and expenditure are low, because of the possibilities for direct appropriation from nature of many of the items in their living, such as food, fuel, and house rent.
- (b) The single-family dwellings, open air, healthy surroundings, and comparative safety for children, are things which may be purchased in towns only with the expenditure of large sums of money. The greater quantities of food consumed by farm families are difficult of evaluation. Compensating for these items in an urban comparison is a very difficult process.
- (c) Next, as regards food consumption, rural classes need more food because they do more physical work and live outdoors. They consume more food in the course of a year, but it is of a poor quality. They eat coarse grains, pulses and occasionally vegetables, while the urban classes consume more wheat, vegetables, meat and dairy products. Moreover, this direct consumption of food produced on the farms leads to a greater use of coarse food without much variety, while the urban classes have a variety of refined foods available with a higher vitamin content and sufficient calories.
- (d) A small variety of clothing is required in the country. Most of it is work-clothing which is standardized (a loin-cloth), and is unaffected by changes in style and fashion. Rural people are satisfied with home made things that do not involve much expense. Their clothing requirements are not only few but seasonal and periodical.
- (e) The above remarks are also true of recreation. Their work is neither monotonous nor debilitating, and with a greater daily leisure and diversion they do not require the same degree of participation in commercialized recreation.

Thus we find that so far as the physiological needs are concerned, the average standard of living of the rural population is lower than that of the urban. Moreover, the urban families have a certain percentage of more net spendable income, available for savings and non-physiological purposes. The living of the farmers is inseparable from the business of the farm, because their surplus spendable income is first distributed between business and living expenses before the individual items of living are given consideration. But urban business life and home life are widely separated. Because of these combinations the rural class has less incentive for saving and investment for the future. The same conclusion may be reached from a comparison of the property accumulated by the rural and urban groups. Although the agricultural class is to a certain extent

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proprietary, nevertheless the average wealth and income of the peasant proprietors fall much below the city proprietary classes, being more nearly equal to those of the urban labouring classes. Moreover, the religious, political and recreational activities enter as items into urban budgets in a greater degree than they enter into rural budgets, because people in rural areas have neither a surplus spendable income nor facilities for such things. Therefore, we conclude that the proportion of the budget used for non-physiological expenses averages less in the country than the city, hence, the proportion of the budget expended for items of current consumption other than so-called basic necessities is the best index of the level of living.

*The Growth of Family and the Lowering of the Standard of Living:* India, like all other Asiatic countries, has a standard of living so low that it touches the minimum of subsistence. This is largely due to an unchecked population growth without a proportionate increase in the avenues of production, or facilities for migration and colonization. The restraining power of a high standard of living upon an increase of population has utterly failed in India, where social customs and traditions, rather than economic postulates, determine the growth of families. This point of view was strong also among the early immigrants to the U.S.A., but a decline in the birth rate of their second generation was easily noticeable with the correspondingly large increase in the income of the family.<sup>1</sup> A similar decrease in birth rate in the 18th century in England, France and Germany witnessed a parallel advance of a higher standard of living.

A country has higher standard of living when its people are prudent and restrain the inclination for family life until they may also gratify other reasonable wants. But a country will always have a low standard of living if the desires of its people are subordinated to the domestic instinct, i.e. when its people undertake the responsibility of a family before they are economically able to support it. Not only does a large family tend to diminish the volume of personal and social satisfactions which the parents may enjoy, but an ever increasing influx of urban population into rural areas pulls down the standard from the margin of existence to that of starvation. Moreover, an increasing army of proletariat render it difficult for the better class to improve or even maintain their own standards, because, "the standard of living of each man rises slowly, constantly

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<sup>1</sup>Rosaline Jones: *The American Standard of Living*—p. 6.

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sucked down by the lower standards of the masses behind.”<sup>2</sup> The enormous increase in the ranks of immigrant, unspecified and landless competing wage-earners, who are to a great extent unemployed or under-unemployed, has greatly reduced the standard among the masses of the working people in this country, without giving promise to improve their own condition.

The difference in the size of the family tends to reduce the amount of spendable income per adult unit in the rural family. The general average size of family in India is about 4.2, whereas, in the case of purely agricultural castes it averages 5.1 adults. This again varies with the caste-groups which follow different agricultural operations. The Chamars have the largest size of family (5.6), followed by Kurmis (4.5). On the other hand the average number of children per family in India is 4.2 against 4.4 in rural families and 4.1 in urban families; and the proportion of total number of children surviving, per mile born, is appreciably higher in rural areas, i.e. 702 against 695 in urban areas. It should further be noted that an increase in the number of non-working dependants, specially in the case of lower class of rural families, is a great drain on their family income. During 1921-31 the number of children (of both sexes) below 13½ years of age constituted 37 per cent. of the total population. During the same period the number of children in the age-group of 0-5 increased by +35 per cent., and by +14.5 per cent. in the age-group of 0-10. Almost all this increase of non-working dependants was notable among the rural agricultural classes in all the provinces of northern India. The ultimate result of this growth of dependants is that the proportion of the budget expended for items of basic necessities is increased at the expense of non-physiological expenses. It should, therefore, be clear that a large size of family on the one hand, and the growth of non-working dependants on the other, without an increase, or proportionate increase, in the spendable income of rural classes, has considerably lowered their standard of living.

*Family Budgets and Standard of Living:* The family budget presents a picture of the economic standard of living of the family and also gives some index of those phases of living that may be styled uneconomic in that they are not translatable into money, but yet serve to satisfy the desires of the family. It shows the sources of deriving income and the purpose and channels of expenditure. Economists generally divide the nature and sources of income into wages and salaries of labouring classes and employees, interests

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<sup>2</sup>J. R. Commons: *Races and Immigrants in America*—p. 112.

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and profits of capitalists, and rents of the landlords. The income of the rural class, with the exception of the hired labourer, represents a combination of almost all kinds of income. As a rule the net spendable income of rural classes is low, because of the possibility for direct appropriation of many of the items of living (such as food, rent and fuel from nature). Similarly, many items of expenditure do not enter the budget. In Switzerland 61 per cent. of the total income of a rural family was in cash and the rest of the income derived from natural products either given them by their employers or secured from their farms.<sup>3</sup> In America Hawthorne found that 38 per cent. of the farmers' needs were supplied by the farm.<sup>4</sup> But in India conditions are quite different. The Kamia labourer gets only food and housing but no cash; the landless field-worker or the unspecified labourer receives only cash wages but no allowance, while the cultivating labourer supplements his money income by appropriations from his farm. In the case of a Kamia social rather than economic conditions determine his standard of living.

The comparative figures of percentage of total expenditure used in different items throw ample light on the standard of living maintained by the working classes in rural areas. In the following pages are given standard budgets of three typical groups of agricultural labourers in Oudh:—<sup>5</sup>

(1) Family budget of a Bagban Labourer, holding 15 bighas of land for vegetable cultivation, and dairying as subsidiary occupation:—

Spendable Income	Amount (Rs.)	P. C. to the total.	Expenditure	Amount (Rs.)	P. C. to the total.
Farm Produce	200	46.0	Food	205	47.1
Dairy Products	120	27.6	Clothing	60	13.8
Wages	75	17.1	Fuel and Light	5	1.1
Earnings of Women and Children }	40	9.3	Wine, Tabacco, Tea etc.	60	13.8
			Recreations	24	5.5
			Social and Religious	24	5.5
			Miscellaneous	57	13.2
	435	100		435	100

<sup>3</sup> and <sup>4</sup>Systematic Source Book in Rural Sociology, op. cit. Vol. III, Ch. IV., p. 371.

<sup>5</sup>Lorenzo: op. cit. pp. 63-65.

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(2) Family Budget of a Guriya Labourer without land but with fishing as his subsidiary occupation:—

Spendable Income	Amount (Rs.)	P. C. to the total.	Expenditure	Amount (Rs.)	P. C. to the total.
Fishing <i>Katiki</i> and <i>Baisakhi</i>	130-0-0	55.3	Food	135-0-0	57.4
Wages	55-0-0	23.4	Clothing	32-0-0	13.7
Earnings of Women and Children	30-0-0	12.8	Fuel and Light	5-0-0	2.1
Casual Income	20-0-0	8.5	Tabacco and Wine	15-0-0	6.4
			Social and Religious	20-0-0	8.5
			Recreations	1-0-0	0.4
			Miscellaneous	27-0-0	11.5
	235-0-0	100		235-0-0	100

(3) Family Budget of a Chamar Labourer without land or subsidiary source of employment:—

Spendable Income	Amount (Rs.)	P. C. to the total.	Expenditure	Amount (Rs.)	P. C. to the total.
Wages earned by labourer	38-0-0	60.3	Food	48-0-0	76.2
Earnings of wife and children	15-0-0	23.7	Clothing	6-0-0	9.5
Casual Income	10-0-0	16.0	Tobacco	2-0-0	3.2
			Social and Religious	2-8-0	4.0
			Ornaments, etc.	1-8-0	2.4
			Miscellaneous	3-0-0	4.7
	63-0-0	100		63-0-0	100

The most striking feature of these budgets of Indian agricultural labourers is the high percentage of total expenditure on food alone, being more than 60 per cent., against 39 for U. S. A., 55 for Russia, and 56 for Holland,<sup>6</sup> which is an index of the low standard of living of the workers. In the case of well-to-do tenants this percentage is not so high as in the case of landless field-workers who stand on the lowest rung of the economic ladder. The percentage of expenditure on food alone in different parts of India, for two classes of workers, is given below:—

<sup>6</sup>Systematic Source Book in Rural Sociology, op. cit. Vol. III, Chapter IV, p. 372.

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	Well-to-do Tenants	Landless Field Workers
1. Oudh <sup>7</sup>	54.8	76.2
2. Bihar	61.1	81.7
3. Bengal <sup>8</sup>	58.0	69.0
4. Chota Nagpur	69.7	92.6

Another important feature of these budgets is that the percentage of expenditure on physiological and basic requirements, (i. e. food, clothing, rent), is the highest, whereas the percentage of expenditure on non-physiological and secondary requirements, (i.e. social and religious, recreation, education of children, etc.), is almost negligible in the majority of cases. Moreover, the percentage of expenditure on non-physiological and secondary requirements is higher in the case of urban industrial workers than in the case of agricultural workers in rural areas, which again is a sure index of the low standard of living of agricultural labourers when compared with their confreres in urban areas:—

Percentage of expenditure on—		
	Physiological and Basic Requirements	Non-physiological and Secondary Requirements
1. Average Agricultural Labourer (Rural)	88.9	11.1
2. Average Industrial Worker (Urban) <sup>9</sup>	73.8	26.2

Thus it will be seen that those agricultural labourers who hold at least 15 bighas of land and have some subsidiary source of income live in comfort; those who hold no land but have some subsidiary occupation live on the margin of efficiency; but the landless and unspecified proletariat with no land or subsidiary employment live in acute indigence. Assuming that an income of Rs. 216/- per annum is the minimum required for a family of 3½ adults, to maintain the prevalent standard of living (on the margin of efficiency), more than 87 per cent. of the 200 families under investigation, were either on the margin or below this standard:—<sup>10</sup>

<sup>7</sup>Lorenzo: op. cit., 1932, pp. 64-65.

<sup>8</sup>Jack: Economic Life of a Bengal District (Faridpur), p. 59.

<sup>9</sup>The Indian Year Book, 1938-39, p. 531. (Average percentage distribution of expenditure of working classes at different centres in India).

<sup>10</sup>Lorenzo: op. cit., p. 61.

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Economic Condition	Percentage of the total number of families under investigation.	Marginal annual income per family (in Rupees)
1. Comfortable Living ..	.. 12.9	216 and over.
2. Margin of Efficiency ..	.. 35.5	144—216.
3. Indigence ..	.. 51.6	Below 144.

*Wages and Living Standards:* Almost all over northern India wages are paid both in cash and kind, but there is no doubt a growing tendency to substitute cash for grain wages. In the United Provinces about 65 per cent. of the agricultural labourers are paid in cash, 20 per cent. in kind and 15 per cent. in each.<sup>11</sup> Sometimes a labourer takes a plot of land either rent-free or at a nominal rental in lieu of wages. Since a large number of non-food articles enter into the family budget of a labourer, cash wages are soon supplanting other forms of payment even in remote rural areas. But the rates of wages prevalent in different parts of the country are so low that the mass of agricultural workers live in a state verging on starvation. In Oudh the average rate of wages rose from 2 annas in 1911 to 4 annas and 6 pies in 1931; in Bengal from 4 to 6 annas; and in Bombay the index number of nominal wages rose from 100 in 1900 to 290 in 1922.<sup>12</sup> This rise continued up to 1927 and wages had increased by more than 50 per cent., even then the average rate for India did not exceed 4 annas and 6 pies per diem.<sup>13</sup> Moreover, there are idle as well as busy agricultural seasons and, therefore, the average rate for the whole year will, after making allowance for grain supplement, hardly exceed 3 annas a day, from which the extremely low standard of living of agricultural workers can well be imagined.

There is also a wide disparity between the wages of industrial and agricultural workers. The Whitley Commission found that Jute-workers were earning from Rs. 17½ to Rs. 38 per month in 1929, cotton ginners in Madras Rs. 13/- per month, coal cutters Rs. 10 to 15 per month, while unskilled men were rarely able to earn more than Rs. 15 a month regularly and earnings were sometimes as

<sup>11</sup>Census Report, United Provinces, 1931, Part I, p. 49.

<sup>12</sup>Report on an Enquiry into Agricultural Wages in the Bombay Presidency, pp. 20-23.

<sup>13</sup>Census Report, United Provinces, 1931, Part I, p. 166.



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low as Rs. 10.<sup>14</sup> The average rate of wages for unskilled industrial workers is Rs. 16 in Nagpur and Rs. 18 in Cawnpore, and if we add the amount earned by women the representative family income comes to Rs. 24 and Rs. 22 respectively.<sup>15</sup> In the villages the level of money incomes is still lower. The unskilled agricultural workers in Oudh earn from Rs. 6 to 9 per month and even after adding the earnings of women and children the average family income does not exceed Rs. 12 per month. In the Western Punjab Rs. 5 per month, with a blanket and a pair of shoes at the end of the year, are what a day-labourer expects, while in the canal colonies he may earn from Rs. 10 to Rs. 12 per month. In Bengal the wages of unskilled agricultural workers range between Rs. 8 and Rs. 18 per month, the rates are generally higher in East and North Bengal than in West Bengal.<sup>16</sup>

It is evident from these figures that the general standard of living is very low in the towns. In the villages, the level of money incomes is still lower. It is true that the needs of the agricultural workers are few and simple and their diet of necessity very cheap, but after making allowance for this also, there is no doubt of general poverty among the agricultural workers. The remuneration of the industrial worker is on a higher level than that of the agricultural worker almost everywhere in the world. But in a country like India, where there is always a vast surplus of rural labour ready to press into the factories for any wage which will enable it to live, the disparity between industrial and agricultural wages cannot be stretched beyond a certain point. "Industrial wages and with them the living standards of industrial workers cannot anywhere exceed rural levels by more than a certain ratio; and the rural levels are depressed by population increase to a point where they afford only the barest subsistence."<sup>17</sup> Therefore it is futile to suppose that the standard of industrial workers can be improved without raising the rural levels by increasing their purchasing power.

*The Movement of Prices and Wages :* The economic condition of agricultural workers naturally depends upon the prosperity of the cultivating classes and the amount of labour available. From 1921 to 1927 when the prices of agricultural produce soared up, and seasons were favourable, there was an ample demand for agricultural

<sup>14</sup>Report on Labour in India, 1930, p. 166.

<sup>15</sup>Dr. R. B. Gupta: Labour and Housing in India, 1930, pp. 76-78.

<sup>16</sup>Dr. R. K. Mukerjee: op. cit., pp. 221-222.

<sup>17</sup>Harold Butler: Problems of Industry in the East, I. L. O. Studies and Reports, Series B (Economic Conditions) No. 29, Geneva 1938, p. 68.

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labourers which increased the wages in 1928 by 50 per cent. above those in 1916. But from February 1928 the price level fell down with very unpleasant consequences for the cultivators. By 1930 the prices had dropped by about one-third, and soon the demand for hired help went down. In the Punjab the average net income per acre of the cultivator fell from Rs. 32-8-4 in 1929 to Rs. 7-14-7 in 1931; and the net income of the majority of cultivators was thus only Rs. 40 per annum.<sup>18</sup> Misra found that in Cawnpore the net profit of the cultivator was Rs. 8 from an acre of gram, Rs. 7-12 from wheat and Rs. 41-10 from *juar*, while the average cultivator's holding in the village under investigation was only 2.47 acres.<sup>19</sup> "In India as a whole, 30 per cent. of the cultivators today have no margin of profit at all."<sup>20</sup> The immediate reaction on wages can be imagined. The gains of the cultivator as a consumer were more than set off by his loss in money income occasioned by the slump in prices, and with his new low margin of profit he could no longer employ any worker for field operations. Consequently, there grew a large surplus of floating farm hands, both skilled and unskilled, in many parts of the country; with the inevitable result that the wage rate continued to fall to bottomless levels.<sup>21</sup>

During the period 1921-28, high prices of agricultural produce and larger incomes from cultivation raised the wages, while many agricultural workers became petty cultivators (tenants-at-will) by depleting their ranks, and this reduction in the supply of labour power again tended to raise the wage level. But from 1929-38 low prices, poor incomes, lowered the wages, while the marginal petty cultivators abandoned cultivation and joined the ranks of field workers, and this further decreased the wage level. It, therefore, follows that the movement of prices has a close relation with the movement of wages :—

1921-28	<div style="display: inline-block; vertical-align: middle;"> <div style="font-size: 3em; vertical-align: middle;">{</div> <div style="text-align: center; padding: 0 10px;"> High Prices. Larger Incomes of cultivators. </div> </div>	<div style="display: inline-block; vertical-align: middle;"> <div style="font-size: 3em; vertical-align: middle;">}</div> <div style="text-align: center; padding: 0 10px;"> Diminished labour supply, owing to the adoption of cultivation by many workers. </div> </div>	<div style="display: inline-block; vertical-align: middle;"> <div style="font-size: 3em; vertical-align: middle;">}</div> <div style="text-align: center; padding: 0 10px;"> High Wages. </div> </div>
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<sup>18</sup>Sardar Kartar Singh: "Farm Accounts in the Punjab."

<sup>19</sup>Misra: "Economic Survey of a Village in Cawnpore District", 1932, pp. 24-27.

<sup>20</sup>Z. A. Ahmed: *The Agrarian Problem in India*, Congress Political and Economic Studies, No. 1, 1938, p. 14.

<sup>21</sup>The U. P. Census Report, 1931, Part I, pp. 39-40.

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1929-38	{ Low Prices. Smaller Incomes of cultivators. }	{ Increased labour supply, due to the abandonment of cultivation by many workers. }	{ Low Wages. }

But it should be noted that although with every fall in prices the rates of wages decline, with the rise in prices there always follows a lag leaving a wide distance of time for wages to adjust sympathetically. This period of lag lays a crushing burden on the marginal cultivators and landless workers who cannot resist or withstand the slightest mishap. In the United Provinces the Index Numbers of prices and wages were as follows:—<sup>22</sup>

Year	Wholesale Prices	Agricultural Wages (unskilled)
1900	107	100
1905	109	100
1910	127	100
1915	173	100
1920	243	120

} Lag

From 1900 to 1915 the index number of prices rose by 66 while the wages remained stationary. This Rising-Price Lag gave huge profits to the cultivators without any material gain to the wage-earners. This was soon followed by the Falling-Price Lag:—

Year	Wholesale Prices	Agricultural Wages (unskilled)
1901	100	100
1916	160	120
1920	243	120
1928	213	180
1930	162	180
1931	112	180
1935	97	180
1938	112	160

} Lag

When there is a lag in wages due to falling prices, it is detrimental both from the point of view of the cultivators and the field workers. It diminishes the income of the cultivators, and not only reduced the wages of the agricultural workers but has thrown many of them out of employment. This has also resulted in a decline in

<sup>22</sup>R. B. Gupta: Agricultural Prices in the U. P., Bureau of Statistics and Economic Research, U. P., Bulletin No. 1, 1933, Statement III (a), p. 32.

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the material condition of the workers, and their wholesale migration to towns and industrial centres is now causing much unrest and alarm. Thus we find that not only the wages of agricultural workers are extremely low, but they suffer from a lag in wages due either to a fall or rise in prices, and unless minimum wages, comparable to those of industrial workers ruling in Western Europe and North America, are set by law and enforced by the State, their standard of living can never be raised.

*Food Budgets And Food Consumption:* The quantity of food consumed does not offer a true index to the standard of living of any class or group of people. The quantitative variations are due largely to regional and physiological conditions. The true index, therefore, can only be set by the quality and variety of food consumed by the rural labouring classes. Since the rural classes almost constantly supplement their food with fruits and vegetables of the season, it is difficult to estimate the exact nature of their food budget, which is possible in the case of urban families where all things are purchased from the market. It has already been discussed at length that in almost all the provinces of India it is only the high class and well-to-do cultivators who consume good quality food and draw nutrition from a variety of sources. But in the case of poor labourers, who constitute the bulk of rural population, the diet is monotonous and limited to coarse cereal flour, *dal*, vegetable oils, and occasional dishes of vegetables. However bulky, their diet falls short of the optimum standard required to maintain vigorous health and efficiency.

The effective consumption of *basic foods*, i.e. rice or *atta*, and *dal* or vegetables; and *energizing foods*, i.e. vegetables and fruits, milk and milk-products, oil or *ghee*, *gur* and condiments; in reasonable combinations results in rational feeding and determines a high standard of living. It is not the volume of basic foods which determines a high level of food consumption, but the derivation of nutrients from a number of foods to form balanced rations for a greater effective absorption of certain basic chemical elements. It has been estimated that, of the total quantity of food consumed, one-third to one-half should be made up from energizing foods, i.e. animal sources, milk products, vegetables. For hard labour, the quantity of starch and sugar should be increased. The proportion of basic foods to energizing foods consumed by various classes of agricultural labourers in some provinces of northern India is as follows:—

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(1) Food Budget of well-to-do cultivators, showing the percentage of Basic to Energizing foods:

Provinces	Total Amount of food consumed (ozs.)	Basic Food (ozs.)	Percentage to the total	Energizing Food (ozs.)	Percentage to the total
Punjab	58	31	53.4	27	46.6
United Provinces	42	20	47.6	22	52.4
Bengal	36	19	52.8	17	47.2

(2) Food Budget of landless agricultural labourers and field-workers showing the percentage of Basic to Energizing foods:

Provinces	Total Amount of food consumed (ozs.)	Basic Food (ozs.)	Percentage to the total	Energizing Food (ozs.)	Percentage to the total
Punjab	49	40	81.6	9	18.4
United Provinces	33	29	87.9	4	12.1
Bengal	28	22	78.6	6	21.4

(3) Food Budget of Agrestic Serfs showing the percentage of Basic to Energizing foods:

Consumers	Total Amount of food consumed (ozs.)	Basic Food (ozs.)	Percentage to the total	Energizing Food (ozs.)	Percentage to the total
Sewaks (Oudh)	21	21	100.0	—	—
Kamias (Bihar)	22	20	90.9	2	9.1

It will be seen from the foregoing statements that the amount of energizing food consumed by well-to-do tenants comes up to the standard, and we can safely conclude that this class is well fed and efficient, and maintains a high level of living, because the effective consumption of energizing foods is greater, yielding a higher chemical value and excess of protein. On the other hand, the effective consumption of energizing foods in the case of field-workers hardly exceeds 18 per cent. of the total amount of food consumed. In the case of agricultural serfs, like the Sewaks of Oudh and the Kamias of Bihar and Chota Nagpur, the consumption of energizing foods is almost nil. Their food supply, therefore, does

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not form a correct compound so as to obviate any chance of malnutrition and consequently of disease, ill-health or premature death. The fact is that field-workers and agrestic serfs are under-provided with protein, the former due to poverty and ignorance of dietetics, and the latter due to circumstances beyond their control. It follows, therefore, that these two classes of labourers are verging on a very low standard of living.

*Rural Housing:* Housing is unquestionably at the root of the village well-being. In the work of rural regeneration the first thing to develop is, what centuries of ill-usage and neglect have worn away, the homes of the cultivators. The study of housing of a particular country leads to the study of the conditions of living, habits and characteristics of the inhabitants. "To know a nation's character," says Kossuth, "we must see it in its homes, and look chiefly to the humbler abodes where that portion of the people dwells which makes the broad basis of the national prosperity."<sup>23</sup> The home is the nucleus of all social and cultural acquirements of man, and the construction of houses and the planning of settlements give sufficient clues to the ideas of taste and comfort and aesthetic ideals of those who live therein. The housing of the rural population has an important bearing on the efficiency and supply of labour and ultimately dominates the question of wages and the standard of living.

The homestead of the Indian cultivator is neither a cottage nor a house known to English or other European farmers. The rural huts, which are made of mud walls with thatched roofing, consist of only one room, and have only one entrance. Most of the landless workers and agricultural serfs have no house of their own but live in small huts provided by the employers, and it can be understood what power a master has over a man in the event of any dispute between them. But prosperous families build larger huts and more of them. The houses of higher castes are commodious, more decent and better built, while those of the lower castes small, built of poor material and ill-ventilated. In some districts of Bengal huts are usually grouped round a spacious courtyard, the cow-sheds and out-houses shifted away from the main dwellings. In Bihar also village planning, though on a different footing, with scattered lonely homesteads, has avoided congestion to the degree we find in the eastern districts of the United Provinces. In many districts of the Ganges-Jumna Doab, houses are in no respect better than the slums of industrial areas, and wherever population pressure has increased on the soil, it has produced a deleterious effect on housing and sanitary conditions, and consequently on the general welfare of the rural folk.

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<sup>23</sup>Wolf: *The Dying Peasant*. (Quoted:.)

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In many villages of Oudh, which have been intensively surveyed, the average number of occupants in a hut varies from 8-12 persons. Numerous cases have been found where the inmates sleep along with cattle and live-stock. In Jaunpur the huts generally consist of only one dingy room with kitchen, dormitory, parlour and in many cases cattle-shed combined.<sup>24</sup> "In village Hatwa (Gorakhpur)", Mathur found that, "a hut measuring 7×13×5 ft. was occupied by five persons and a goat, and the inmates were thin, diseased and dirty."<sup>25</sup> In village Sheikhdhir (Bahraich), it was found that two bullocks, fishing tackle and four members of a Guriya caste labourer's family were packed into a dark and stinky "house" measuring 14×14×7 ft.<sup>26</sup> Too often, therefore, a village family has for a home a dwelling which is scandalously below its needs, besides being leaky and unhealthy. Even when a village seems to be well-organized and prosperous, the prosperity is usually that of the non-agricultural classes, because usually the best cottages are occupied by the mahajans, proprietary castes, mukhiyas, and other men engaged in rural industries.

The enormous pressure of accommodation on village homesteads and cottages is due largely to the rapid increase in rural population. The growth of 'city-servants and village-residents', and the increase of bovine population has aggravated the effects of congestion in rural areas. In certain parts of Bihar and in the eastern and submontane districts of the United Provinces, open spaces are hardly to be met within the *abadi*, the huts being crowded together, while the streets are narrow and tortuous, and sometimes impossible due to the collection of refuse water from the drains and the excreta of the village cattle. "To many peasants", observes Dr. Mukherjee, "the huts are simply places where one can stretch his legs and sleep in the night, and in several instances the loss of privacy blunts all sense of shame and decency. Men and women, young and old, sometimes may be seen packed together along with cattle and goats in winter, and the home that should radiate noble social and aesthetic influences is a den of misery and disease where people breed and die like fruit-flies."<sup>27</sup>

It hardly needs pointing out that the social, economic and moral regeneration of the rural folk will depend upon the extent to which we are able to improve their living conditions. In ancient India the village sites were thoughtfully chosen, and the dwelling

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<sup>24</sup>Bholanath Misra—Over-population in Jaunpur—p. 55.

<sup>25</sup>Pressure of Population in Gorakhpur, p. 48,

<sup>26</sup>Lorenzo: Agricultural Labour and Market Gardening in Oudh, 1932, p. 69.

<sup>27</sup>Mathur: op. cit., Introduction by Dr. Radhakamal Mukerji, P. (V.)

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houses, streets, tanks, the temple, the *akhara* (club), playgrounds, and meeting places were all beautifully and methodically laid out. The village was divided into sections for different classes of people with complete arrangement for drinking water, drainage and general sanitation. The decay of village communal life meant the decay of the rural settlement and the country cottage. In the absence of adequate check from local organizations very often huts have been thickly massed at all angles and every inch of available open space is covered. The extension of congested village sites has been discouraged by landlords, either by levying '*nazrana*' or ejecting the tenant who builds any erection on any field in his holding, and for purposes of expansion inhabitants have to found '*purwas*' which are necessarily situated on uncultivated land, usually unhealthy '*baghs*' or barren shadeless bits of '*uscr*'.<sup>28</sup> Therefore, for the development of a healthy individual and community life it will be necessary to lay out well-planned village sites and place the buildings in relation to their surroundings.

The progress of town planning should have a favourable effect on rural housing in the future. The planning of village sites shall include not only the laying out of new rural settlements, but also the re-planning of the areas that have already been built up and where the lay out is haphazard and insanitary. All planning shall have to be carried out in complete harmony with the local and regional character of the village, and it shall be necessary to evolve such art and design as would impart a national character to our village settlements and serve to intensify and enhance the beauty of indigenous institutions. For this purpose extensive surveys of typical natural regions shall have to be carried out by specially trained staff, and the plan evolved from such surveys shall guide all future developments.

An attempt should now be made to revive the healthy, beautiful and picturesque village sites of ancient India. This will require planning of village streets and lanes with reference to the important buildings and village meeting places; extension of congested village sites by acquiring land from the landlord on the payment of such compensation as is within the means of the villagers; controlling the construction of model houses in the interests of public health, safety, adequate lighting, ventilation, repairs, and protection against fire; development of the means of communication to distribute the population more evenly over the country and to bring about a closer con-

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<sup>28</sup>Drake-Brockman: Report on Economic Planning in the United Provinces, 1937, p. 57.



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tact between agriculture and industry, urban and rural life; disposal of waste and sewage, and the provision for education, marketing, recreation, etc. This programme shall have to be taken up under the supervision of the resident organiser and the Panchayats. The Panchayat shall become an effective link between the District Officers and various rural development departments on the one hand, and the villagers on the other; and shall be armed with legal powers both to take cognizance of offence, and try breaches of bye-laws, in co-operation with the S. D. O. or the Tahsildar.

## CHAPTER XI

### SUBSIDIARY EMPLOYMENT IN AGRICULTURE

*The Importance of Rural Industries:* Agricultural countries all over the world are generally poor, and the severity of poverty can only be offset when the cultivators are men of skill and capable of adjusting their labour to seasonal changes in their occupation. In a predominantly agricultural country, it is the subsidiary occupation that keeps the rural population intact and the agricultural wealth developing. At the root of much poverty of the Indian people lies the unfortunate circumstance that agriculture forms almost the sole occupation of the mass of the population, and that no remedy for present evils can be complete which does not include the introduction of a diversity of occupations through which the surplus population may be drawn from agricultural pursuits and led to find the means of subsistence in manufactures or some such employments.<sup>1</sup> Pillai observes that, subtracting the land utilized for supplying foreign markets from the total area under cultivation, we shall find that what is left over does not represent more than two-thirds of an acre per head of the total Indian population.<sup>2</sup> With this man-land-ratio, India cannot survive long in these days of break-neck competition and hard livelihood. The obvious remedy for this economic mal-adjustment is to seek other outlets for this surplus population, and the cry for rural industrial development is a natural outcome of this imperious economic necessity.

The problem of adjusting the rural population to available resources, and determining an efficient economic man-land-ratio, has been felt equally by all the countries of the world. But France, Germany, Italy and Japan have made remarkable headway in this matter. France leads all the countries of Europe where sericulture, silviculture and vine-culture are the cultivators' chief subsidiary occupations. These industries yield very high returns, and therefore, the peasantry is far better off than elsewhere. In Italy and Holland dairy-keeping and toy-making, lace and embroidery works, are commonly handled. Dairying and poultry-farming, fruit culture and cattle-rearing, are the chief occupations of northern-American farmers. In Japan and China cocoon-rearing is the chief spare-time in-

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<sup>1</sup>Famine Commission Report—Vol. I, P. 175.

<sup>2</sup>Economic Conditions in India.

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dustry employing more than ten million families. Poultry farming is another favourite subsidiary industry of Japanese farmers engaging more than four million families. Now this problem has grown intense due to the economic transition of India, and the betterment of rural masses depends to a very large extent upon the development of such resources as will ameliorate the low economic condition of the people.

The arguments for the development of rural industries ancillary to agriculture are obvious and many :—

*Firstly*, the existence of extreme fragmentation, whether due to socio-political or socio-economic causes, has greatly diminished the income of the peasants. In Gorakhpur the average cultivated area per individual is 0.27 acre and the average holding per cultivator is something like 0.52 acre.<sup>3</sup> In Jaunpore a holding of 0.13 acre is divided into four fragments of 0.7, 0.2, 0.2, and 0.2, and more than 50 per cent. of cultivators possess undersized holdings.<sup>4</sup> In the submontane districts of Oudh more than half the cultivators possess uneconomic holdings and are, therefore, the specimen of the most poverty-stricken and degenerated class of cultivators.<sup>5</sup> The agricultural profits from these undersized holdings are so small that the agricultural labourers cannot depend solely upon them, but have to move out to earn wages on others' fields or in nearby towns.

*Secondly*, the problem of over-population has become acute in many tracts of the Ganges valley, which exhibits some of the most densely populated regions of the world. As the pressure on the soil increases, the whole fabric of agricultural and rural life undergoes a change. There is often an attempt to meet this situation by extensive cultivation and multiple cropping. Sometimes it also leads to the continuous cityward drift or emigration to more distant regions, thus leading to the disintegration of the settled economic life of village communities. Since the expansion of cultivation has reached its peak in many districts of the Indo-Gangetic plains, overcrowding in agriculture has resulted in the diminution of the size of holdings and their pepper-pot distribution, which has caused a general lowering of the standard of living. Another serious evil of rural over-population is to be found in the enormous pressure of accommodation on village homesteads and cottages, and ultimately on the social economy and the health and vitality of the people. Diversity of

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<sup>3</sup>Mathur: The Pressure of Population in Gorakhpur District, p. 2.

<sup>4</sup>Misra: Over-population in Jaunpur, p. 6.

<sup>5</sup>Lorenzo: Agricultural Labour and Market Guarding in Oudh, 1932, Chapter I, p. 19.

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occupation, therefore, to accommodate the surplus and floating rural population, is the pressing need of India, and this can be done by the opening of new supplementary occupations and trades. This will not only relieve the pressure of population but also bring about a large addition of income to the cultivators who stay at home.

*Thirdly*, the course of prices during the last two decades has had a lasting effect on the income of the cultivators. Immediately before the World War I, the weighted index number of cereals was 135, and in 1919, when the prices were at their highest pitch, it stood at 263, i.e. 163 per cent. above the base year. In the first quarter of 1931, it stood at 97. Thus the prices were reduced to half in about a year's time.<sup>6</sup> From February 1930, onwards, when the *Rabi* crop was gathered, the price level collapsed with very unpleasant consequences for the cultivator who depends upon the proceeds of the *Rabi* to pay his dues to the landlord and his creditors. By the end of June 1930, prices had dropped by about one-third, and continued to fall after the harvesting of the *kharif* crop.<sup>7</sup> The fall became precipitous at the beginning of 1931, and showed no signs of recovery till the harvesting of the *kharif* in October 1933. As a result of these landslides in prices the petty cultivators have not been able to pay three years' arrears of revenue, a good many could not go for *rabi* sowings, because due to their bad economic conditions no one could advance them money or seed, and some of them have come to the verge of ejection. This menace of a fall in prices has to a great extent been responsible for the low standard of living, growth of indebtedness, expropriation of peasant proprietors, and the increase of landless labourers. The only way, therefore, to safeguard the interests of the cultivators, against the cyclic collapse in prices, is to encourage subsidiary industries in all the unprotected agricultural zones of India.

*Finally*, there is an all-round rise in the standard of living of the cultivators. During the past two decades the whole social and economic organization of the village communities has undergone a pronounced transformation under the pressure of new forces of social and economic relativity. The foremost feature of modern villages in transition is their increasing dependence on outside markets owing to the changes in the standard of living. The growing rural-urban relationship has opened new vistas of progress, while the mass-contact programme of the Congress has infused a new zest in life. The uplift of the Harijans, most of whom constitute the fund of agricultural

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<sup>6</sup>Gupta—Agricultural prices in the United Provinces, p. 8.

<sup>7</sup>The U. P. Census Report—Part I, Vol. XVIII—1931, p. 38.

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labour, and the progress of primary education even in remote rural areas, have broken the barriers in the way of national development. With the increase of commercial agriculture the purchasing power of the cultivators has increased and their demands multiplied. This rise in the mode of living, if not backed by a substantially increased income, will be short-lived and highly detrimental to national prosperity. It has, therefore, become imperative to supplement the income of rural masses by the introduction of subsidiary industries.

*The Period of Inactivity:* The seasonal character of the agricultural operations has resulted in an uneven distribution of labour power. This waste of rural labour is due specially to the enforced unemployment which lasts on an average from 150-270 days in the year. Since agriculture in northern India does not denote mixed farming familiar to England, and consists of harvesting and disposal of two crops, namely, *Kharif* and *Rabi* in the year, the net wastage of labour approximates 200 days, or 60 per cent. of his working time, which results in a tremendous loss of income. The period of complete inactivity in each agricultural region varies with the nature and variety of crops and croppings, as will be seen from the following investigations:—

- (1) Jack in Bengal has estimated 9 months' idleness for jute growers, and  $7\frac{1}{2}$  months' for jute and rice growers.<sup>8</sup>
- (2) In Bihar, Orissa and Chota Nagpur, as a whole, the peasant is occupied for not more than 200 days. (Calculated).
- (3) Dr. Radhakamal Mukerjee found that in Oudh, if the cultivator sows 2 acres with early rice followed by peas, and half an acre with cane, by working alone he would have sufficient to occupy him for 250 days in the year. If he sowed *kodon* and *arhar* rotating with barley, he would have 150 days' work on an average.<sup>9</sup>

In the submontane districts of the United Provinces (Gonda, Bahrach, Gorakhpore), the cultivator has 177 days' full labour and 188 days' complete leisure, i.e. 52 per cent. of the total working period is wasted for lack of any subsidiary occupation. The landless worker undergoes an enforced unemployment of 185 days, gets 100 days' casual and part-time employment, and 80 days' full labour on the fields.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup>Economic Life of a Bengal District—pp. 38-39.

<sup>9</sup>Rural Economy of India.

<sup>10</sup>Lorenzo, op. cit., p. 144.

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- (4) Calvert in the Punjab found that the work done by an average cultivator is not more than 150 days' full labour, whereas Bhalla in Hoshiarpur has estimated that the cultivator works for 278 days only, taking a normal day of ten hour.<sup>11</sup>
- (5) The Agricultural Commission assumed that by far the greater number of cultivators have at least two to four months of absolute leisure.<sup>12</sup>

Thus it will readily be seen that there is a great wastage of rural labour in almost all parts of India. Unfortunately, in the absence of organized supplementary industries, this period of inactivity is whiled away in idleness, festivities and merriments. It is seldom that the idle labourers hire themselves out in the towns as mill hands or ordinary coolies, because, neither is there so instantaneous a demand, mills being slack during these seasons, nor do these labourers care to move about in such quests. It is, therefore, very necessary that rural cottage industries should be developed to exploit the natural resources of the village and adjust the seasonal feasting and fasting of the labourers. The Royal Agricultural Commission emphasized the development of rural industries with the chief idea of utilizing the leisure periods of the villagers providing them with new sources of earning, and finally, developing the rural industries and resources which stand as basic foundations of National Industrial Development.

*Survival of Hereditary Occupations Subservient to Agriculture:* The industrial castes having adopted agriculture as their chief occupation, still ply their hereditary crafts and thus balance the periods of under-employment to seasons of hyper-activity. The importance of such a tendency was brought to notice by the U. P. Banking Enquiry Committee, which at any rate attributed to their hereditary occupations (returned as subsidiary occupations) the comparative freedom of a considerable proportion of the peasantry from heavy indebtedness.<sup>13</sup> The abandonment of caste-functions is not only slow but difficult in certain directions. The functions of many castes cannot be encroached upon by other castes, hence the perpetuation of inherited aptitude and a tendency towards monopolistic profession. Moreover, the extraordinary hereditary functions, which have been subordinated to the esteem of cultivation, regulate the mechanism of rural life and the emoluments and perquisites in return for these socio-religious services supplement their scanty incomes from agri-

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<sup>11</sup>Board of Economic Enquiry, Punjab, Publications Nos. I and II.

<sup>12</sup>Central Report, para 488.

<sup>13</sup>The U. P. Banking Enquiry Report, 1930, p. 95.

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culture. The village *Mali*, who is normally a market gardener, is in great demand on pseudo-religious occasions at the time of offering flowers to gods. The *Chamar* or *Kori* functions extraordinarily engaged as exorcist, when he is not ordinarily engaged as an agricultural labourer or cultivator. Similarly, the *Nai*, the *Kahar*, the *Pasi*, the *Dom*, and a host of others, by following their hereditary functions, not only establish the credit or the pedigree of the family and show the inter-dependence as well as the solidarity of castes, but reveal the workings of a sound system making both their ends meet.

In the submontane districts of Oudh, the lower castes like Dhimars, Guriyas, Mahars, Kolis and Machwas earn a net annual income of Rs. 150/- by fishing—their hereditary calling. In village Barhan, District Agra, twenty out of thirty-one families of landless *Chamar* labourers survive only because 80 per cent. of their earnings come from their hereditary occupation. Similarly, the Kumhars, Julahas, Ahirs, Bahelias and Kewats, who are field-workers, and are almost never occupied for their full time in the fields, follow their traditional occupation as their subsidiary source of income. Blunt compiled a statement from the Census of 1911 showing the traditional occupation in sample castes, and his figures prove that not only is the proportion of persons who follow their traditional occupation in the agricultural castes very high, but in the non-agricultural castes also—i.e. 75 per cent. or over in the case of Sonars, Bhangis, Umars, Kasundhans; 70 per cent. for Dhobis, Bhunjais, Halwais; 55 per cent for Nais, Barhais Agrahris, Kandus, Julahas, Kumhars, Telis; while the seven Bania castes are almost always engaged in some trade or industry.<sup>14</sup> The explanation of the prevalence of this tendency among the lower classes only is the scanty income from their principal callings. These classes have become agricultural labourers to acquire a higher social status, with uneconomic or no holding whatsoever, and it, therefore, becomes necessary for them to find employment by resorting to their hereditary occupations.

**Present Position:** In 1931 the number of actual workers who returned a subsidiary occupation was 44 per mille in India. In the United Provinces, as a whole, out of every 10,000 total population, 4,174 were returned as earners, and out of these 595, or 14 per cent. returned a subsidiary occupation. Of these 364 (three-fifths) returned an agricultural or pastoral head; 104 industrial; 50 trade; and 31 general labour. Nevertheless, it will be noticed that subsidiary occupations absorb only a minute percentage of the total population:—<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup>Caste system in Northern India, p. 240.

<sup>15</sup>Census of U. P., Part I, Vol. XVIII, p. 414, 1931

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Earners with:—	Persons (per cent.)	Males (per cent.)	Females (per cent.)
1. No subsidiary occupation	86	85	89
2. An Agricultural subsidiary occupation.	8	8	7
3. A non-agricultural subsidiary occupation	6	7	4

This is due to the fact that people can hardly distinguish between their principal and subsidiary occupation. In certain cases an abandoned traditional occupation is supposed to be a subsidiary occupation, but, as has already been remarked, the tendency when in doubt is to return agricultural, with a combination of unspecified tasks, as the principal occupation on account of its respectable status. Thus the bulk of subsidiary occupations are eclipsed by the principal calling, which may perhaps be responsible for the understatement of returns in the Census.

It is interesting to note that all over northern India there is a tendency for non-cultivating landlords to maintain a non-agricultural subsidiary occupation, whereas the cultivating tenants have, although to a small extent, an agricultural subsidiary occupation. The agricultural labourers return the greatest proportion of agricultural subsidiary occupation for each sex. Since most people follow more than one occupation, the different aspects of their combined callings can hardly be analysed, and the nature of agricultural and non-agricultural subsidiary occupations cannot be clearly distinguished. For instance, the tenant cultivates his land, works as hireling on his neighbour's field, sublets a portion of his land, deals in grain and money-lending. Similarly a landless labourer works as a hireling, artisan, trader, pedlar, and cultivating tenant. In the United Provinces and the Punjab, there is a combination of an agricultural with some non-agricultural occupation, but in Bengal and North Bihar there is a greater proportion of those who maintain a subsidiary agricultural occupation along with their principal occupation—agriculture. It is due to the fact that in those provinces there is not much scope for outside multiple cropping and horticulture which is in itself very profitable.

Whether the subsidiary industries of an agricultural nature are more lucrative than the non-agricultural, will depend on such factors as accessibility to raw materials, initial outlay, outside demand, capacity for long-term employment, and possibilities of expansion. This will also depend on a judicious and well-planned introduction of those industries only which are easy to start with and leave a big margin of profit to the labourers.



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*Regional Distribution of Subsidiary Industries:* The selection of industries for rural areas will be based on regional facilities and comparative advantage of particular districts in regard to the supply of raw material, availability of adequate finance and the existence of a permanent market. Any plan of rural industrial development, which does not take these preliminary conditions into consideration, will most likely fail to achieve the desired end, because subsidiary rural industries have a direct and complementary relationship with agricultural seasons and the supply of labour power. A number of small village industries which are within the scope of every cultivator, and are likely to stabilize agriculture without any specialization, are given below:—

- (a) *Industries suitable for the Submontane (Tarai) Regions:* These districts lie at the foot of the Himalayas and enjoy a very heavy rainfall. Most of them are riverine tracts, partly covered with forests, which yield valuable woods, bamboos, herbs and grasses of commercial importance. Therefore, the most paying industries which can be developed on scientific lines are fishing, toddy-drawing, basket-weaving, rope-making and grass-cutting. Fruit-farming is also profitable if fruits such as bananas, lemons, papayas, mangoes, jack-fruit, etc., are grown.
- (b) *Industries suitable for the Dry and Arid regions:*—The dry regions of Central Ganges-Jamuna-Doab and the western districts of the United Provinces, which are not so rich as the Tarai districts, can best be devoted to flower-gardening and perfume manufacture, lac culture, *pan* cultivation, and poultry-farming. In Jaunpur, Kanauj and Ghazipur, oils and *itrs* are manufactured out of flowers, such as *Bela*, *Chameli*, *Keora*, and the *Khasgrass*, and command a large sale all over India. In Mirzapur, Bareilly and Saharanpur, in the United Provinces, and the Uprhar districts of Chota-Nagpur, the Khatiks, Kanjars, Chamaras, Hos, and Mundas make their living by poultry-farming. If marketing facilities are afforded, almost all the districts near hill-stations and the suburbs of big towns can grow into fowl-breeding centres and provide employment to a large number of agricultural labourers.
- (c) *Industries suitable for regions in the vicinity of big cities and towns:*—It should be the privilege of all surrounding districts of an urban or industrial centre to specialize their land for market-gardening and fruit-culture. The whole Gangetic plain is exceedingly rich in the production of a large variety of fruits and leafy and root vegetables. There is scarcely a village which does not produce enough vegetables for local consumption, but market-gardening on a commercial scale has not yet been deve-

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loped. There is an insatiable and growing demand for all kinds of fruits and vegetables in urban centres, and a plot devoted to market gardening will not only occupy the labourer's time for the whole year, but will yield him a high income such as may not otherwise be possible. In Bahraich, Lucknow, Bareilly, and Moradabad districts, fruit-culture and market-gardening are at a rapid rate supplanting such staple crops as barely, wheat, maize and even rice. It has been found that an acre under vegetables is worth six to eight times the value of an acre under wheat, and the fact that the cultivation of heavy yielding crops minimizes the evils of small-holdings, and gives employment to the whole family during the periods of inactivity, is sufficient proof of its importance. The following table shows the income from various crops and the amount of land required to earn an income of at least rupees twenty per month to main a living standard for an average family of  $3\frac{1}{2}$  adults :—<sup>16</sup>

Crops	Income per <i>bigha</i> from a fair crop (per month)	Number of <i>bighas</i> re- quired to get an in- come of Rs. 20 -per month. <sup>17</sup>
1. <i>Vegetable Crops</i> :—		
Pumpkin and Gourd	15 - to 25 -	1.00
Tomato and Bitter gourd	50 - to 60 -	0.45
Chillies, Ginger, Onion	50 - to 70 -	0.45
Cabbage and Cawliflower	50 - to 70 -	0.35
Potatoes	50 - to 60 -	0.40
Leafy Vegetables	10 - to 15 -	1.50
2. <i>Vegetable-Fruits</i> :—		
Kakri and Khira	40 - to 60 -	0.45
Musk—and Water-melons	35 - to 45 -	0.50
Other fruits	30 - to 40 -	0.65
3. <i>Staple Food Crops</i> :—		
Wheat	12 - to 16 -	1.25
Rice	15 - to 20 -	1.00
Gram and Barley	6- to 8-	3.00
Maize	8- to 10 -	2.25
Peas and Kodon	5- to 8-	3.15

<sup>16</sup>Prevalent standard of living in Oudh: Lorenzo, op. cit., Chap. II.

<sup>17</sup>3025 sq. yds. = 1 *bigha*.

1.6 *bighas* = 1 acre.

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**Seasonal Industries:** The seasonal character of the agricultural operations has resulted in an uneven distribution of labour power. It is, therefore, necessary that such rural cottage industries should be introduced as would adjust the seasonal feasting and fasting of the cultivators. There are particularly two periods when agricultural labour is completely out of work—i.e., from the middle of April to the middle of June; and after the sowing in *Asarh* (middle of July) when the crop is growing. At present the summer period of idleness is completely wasted, while during the latter period there is wholesale migration from the villages to the industrial and mining centres. Seasonal migration of labour power due to partial employment or unemployment, not only makes permanent agriculture difficult but increases economic competition and lowers the rate of wages in industrial and mining areas. The presence of a floating population in urban areas, when there is no work in the villages, and its reversion during the busy season, represent features of grave social and economic unsettlement, which challenge economic planning. The only way of checking this pendulous labour force, and of stabilizing agriculture, is by introducing seasonal industries which will not only absorb the surplus labour but will serve to increase the purchasing power of the rural masses without which the pace of industrial advancement cannot be accelerated.

During the summer, when outdoor work of any kind is difficult, and even indoor work requires much physical exertion on the plains of northern India, simple industries like rope-making, basket-weaving, khaddar-weaving, *tat*, *newar* and carpet-making, cane-work and *bidi*-making can easily be taken up. After the *rabi* sowing there is a favourable season for honey extraction, toddy-drawing, fishing, ghee-making, bangles and toy-manufacturing, cocoon-rearing, etc.

There are then the industries which require a short-term training and specialization, e.g. wood-work, including carving and inlaying, brass-ware and metal-work, carpet-making, dyeing and calico-printing, button and comb-making, soap and paper manufacturing, utensil making, lock and cutlery works and leather-curing. There is an unlimited field for the development of indigenous industries, and with a little initiative and assistance the idle and under-employed agricultural worker can find a permanent employment and earn a comparatively large and stable income.

**Rural Industrial Planning:** There is need for reorientation of the rural industrial policy in India. Rural regeneration could come only by falling back on the old system of making every small unit of population self-supporting in all its needs. Large scale industrialization is often put forward as the only remedy for relieving the pressure on land. But centralized production under the modern in-

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dustrial regime has failed in India to give the masses adequate employment and bread. It has led to class struggle and detachment of labour from agriculture without giving stability in the urban industry. There is to be marked a universal discontent resulting from a system of capitalist enterprise which has often contributed to eliminate cottage production. Since the Indian industries depend mainly on the home market, industrialization would remain ineffective unless the purchasing power of the rural masses is raised considerably. Therefore, the conversion of each cottage into a workshop would not only increase the spendable income of the peasantry, but will facilitate the growth of capital in their hands, and pave the way for a successful industrial policy in India.

Cottage industries are suited to the genius of our people and in many respects enjoy natural advantages against large scale production. They include all subsidiary industries which absorb only part of the time of the worker and cover a wide range from simple village crafts as those of the potter to the highly skilled wood-work of Saharanpur or Brass-work of Moradabad. Village industries now are not only isolated and unrelated, but too small to require hired help besides family hands. There is little organization among cottage industrialists in the sphere of production. Contact between the consumer and producer is usually lacking. Designs and shapes have got stereotyped and deteriorated. Co-operative and state aid is deplorably lacking. The re-organization of cottage industries through co-operative and other methods, and State assistance in marketing and technical education, can alone bring about that balance of occupations which the economic organization of India sadly needs, and which alone can mitigate the present crisis due to the continuous multiplication of the class that the land cannot maintain as misfits and failures.

Rural Industrial Planning should, therefore, include a proper organization for production, instruction, finance and marketing. Each cottage industry has its own individual and peculiar problem, but taking a broad general view of the conditions prevailing among cottage industrialists, it appears that there is an urgent need for the organization of supply of raw materials, finance and standardized production. The record of co-operative societies in this direction is full of failures. The difficulties of productive co-operation among ignorant workers owning no assets in the shape of tools and machinery have been aggravated by the absence of detailed guidance and elaborate assistance. But experience shows that the difficulties are not insurmountable, provided arrangements are made for giving continuous trained guidance and for assisting the societies with capital and marketing facilities.

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A comprehensive policy of State assistance is necessary. Since co-operative societies will necessarily take time to develop, and the need is urgent, the burden of organizing the cottage industries should fall upon the Government in the beginning.<sup>18</sup> The re-organization of cottage industries should be planned on the following lines :—

“There should be a local organization at each manufacturing centre to control production. An expert technical supervisor should be employed to demonstrate to the workers the use of improved appliances and to see that the work is done according to instructions. There should be a store at each centre under the technical supervisor, which will arrange to supply raw material, to collect finished products, and to finance the workers. An inspector should be employed for a group of centres and the whole scheme should be controlled by the “Cottage Industries Board” under the supervision of a wholetime Assistant Director of Cottage Industries. The function of this Board, which will be financed by the Provincial Government, would be to (a) maintain local centres, (b) carry out surveys of selected industries and establish them in suitable regions, (c) provide facilities for research and experiment, (d) render expert advice and financial assistance to selected cottage industries, (e) develop production by improving the technique of manufacture, use of improved appliances and the introduction of new and better designs, (f) establish organizations for finishing, fitting up or treating the goods so as to make them more marketable, (g) establish marketing organizations at important consuming centres both at home and abroad. The United Provinces Cottage Industries Committee recommended that the Government should give a grant of Rs. 1½ lakhs a year to the Board to carry out this scheme on a five-year plan.<sup>19</sup> The worker is conservative and suspicious and very often it will be only when he has tangible benefits coming to him from state-aid schemes that his confidence will be won and the soil will be prepared for his being organized co-operatively. India has yet to learn much from the western countries where successful state-aid has stabilized agriculture only through the organization of cottage industries.

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<sup>18</sup>Report of the Cottage Industries Committee, U. P. 1938, Para 19, p. 8.

<sup>19</sup>Report op. cit., Chapter III, Para 28, p. 10.

## CHAPTER XII

### ORGANIZATION OF LABOUR POWER

*The Need for Organizing Agricultural Labourers:* The only way by which the economic position and social spirit of agricultural workers can be improved, and better citizens for a better country can be produced, is by organizing them into strong Unions. It is believed that this plan is both psychologically and financially advantageous to these unprotected and neglected masses. Unity is always strength and the fight with the employers can be won only when the mass of scattered, unorganized and selfish labourers is organized into a strong army of disciplined wage earners. The greater the strength of the workers, the better would they be able to make their lot. Some people talk of goodwill as a substitute for good laws, good wages and good conditions of work, but in these days of capitalistic exploitation powerful forces are operating against the weak workers. There is a sort of tussle always going on between the workers and employers. The latter are stronger and therefore they pull the workers who are weaker. The result is that the workers lose. They are at first discouraged, then they grow weak, and all their enthusiasm ebbs away. This leads to further oppression and exploitation, which can be combated only by a powerful and effective organization.

Despite the work of philanthropists and political organizers, the rural worker in India has remained aloof from the Trade Unions. The reasons are obvious. The agricultural industry is composed of scattered and often inaccessible units; there is a close personal relationship engendered between the master and the worker; the financial resources of agricultural workers are small. The conservative habits of mind of those associated with the land, the futility of the strike as a lever in face of the slow processes of nature, the abundance of the unemployed ranks of landless and unspecified workers who can be employed as substitutes in times of strikes, all these drawbacks have stood in the way of effective organization and every attempt at direct action has been foredoomed to failure. The organizers who are responsible for the direction of the Union Policy have wisely devoted their energies to campaigns for social betterment. In this respect, therefore, the agricultural worker falls behind his industrial brother, but in years to come a greater concerted action will be needed for organizing the agricultural working classes because, the agrarian problems are far more fundamental to India than the Labour situation in the industrial centres.

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*Agrarian Movements vs. Industrial Labour Organizations:* Agrarian movements and industrial labour movements are parallel manifestations of the democratic movement of the times. Although characteristic differences may arise in the nature of their constituents, the fundamental causes of their rise are economic and social, and therefore their objectives and programmes are similar and they have to follow a common method of attack to achieve their end.

Attempts have been made at various times to unite the agrarian and the labour movements for both economic and political ends, and the most extensive experiments in this direction have been carried out in the U.S.S.R., and the U.S.A. In the Soviet Union the Agricultural and Industrial Workers' Unions have been merged into the Peasants' and Workers' Government, and in America the Knights of Labour, the Farmers' Alliance, and Farmer-Labour Party have attempted to effect consolidation of agrarian and industrial interests for the advancement of political policies.<sup>1</sup> In China also since the Renaissance movement under the direction of the Kuomintang, the Farmers' Leagues and Industrial Workers' Unions have joined hands for a common struggle against capitalist exploitation.<sup>2</sup> In India also there is now a definite move towards the combination of agrarian and industrial labour movements, and the organization of the National Labour and Peasant Party in the United Provinces, and the South Indian Federation of Peasants and Workers are an indication of this imperious necessity.

There is, in India, a close affinity between the rural and urban workers' organizations. If the rural workers are in a bad plight, it is difficult for the industrial workers to improve their lot. After all it is from the peasantry that most of the workers come. A very large number among the peasants are idle, that is why whenever there is a strike there are any number of peasants available to take the place of the strikers and the strike falls through. Similarly, the organization and control of agricultural workers suffer in the rural areas on account of the influx of streams of floating industrial hands in off-seasons and during the times of strikes. However strong may be the industrial workers' organization, poverty, unemployment and disorganization among the agricultural labourers are bound to act as a deadweight. Therefore, unless the problem of the peasantry is solved, their standard improved and ranks combined, there will continue to be an economic and consequently political unrest in all the industrial centres of the country.

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<sup>1</sup>Alvin Johnson: "Labour and Agrarian Movements," encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences, p. 492.

<sup>2</sup>Fang-Fu'an: Chinese Labour, pp. 6-8.

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The rural and urban workers' organizations should, therefore, it is hand in hand, supporting and supplementing each other's programme, because the fight is common against the capitalists—whether they be landlords or mill-owners. Moreover, when in any kind of rural organization, quasi-urban or urban labourers and artisans come in contact with field-workers and farm-hands, the result is often to develop the fibre and enlarge the horizon of the rural element. Therefore, it is essential to raise both of them together, otherwise neither is expected to rise much.

*Agrarian Movements in Northern India:* Within the rural society genuine class struggles may emerge in the form of conflicts between the estate-owners and small proprietors, tenants and landlords, and hired workers and employers. These conflicts contrast sharply with general conflicts between town and country interests which characterize a true agrarian movement. In India the emergence of agrarian movements is due entirely to the encroachment of urban interests upon the vital rural interests. Such encroachments have taken the form of the absorption of the better agricultural lands by urban wealth, the saddling of the whole rural communities with heavy debts, and the introduction of a host of parasites called "middlemen" as a result of absentee landlordism.

Hunger for land is the principal motive of the peasant movements in the North. Since all peasant interests, social and political, and their very life, are built around the institution of land, it is not surprising that modern agrarian movements are also built around it. The agrarian movements in Russia were based on the principle of "Land and Freedom", while in Central Europe the agrarian demand resulted in the socialization of land, regulation of taxes and tariffs, and freedom from the clutches of the landlords. The Indian agrarian movement has also been organized with the objects of redistributing land, abolishing slave labour and *begar*, raising the standard of living, allocating political power to the *kisans* and landless field-workers, and attaining these ends by legislation.

American agrarianism has been mainly political. The European agrarian movement has won its chief victories through Co-operation, although it has awaited itself of political means.<sup>3</sup> But Indian agrarianism, though at present under way, appears to be the natural expression of agrarian ideals and sentiments and has therefore promptly assumed a moral colour. Like the Central European movements it is not characterized by violence of thought or action, but has

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<sup>3</sup>McBride: "Agrarian Movements", *Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences*, Vol. I, p. 491.



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adopted, though unsuccessfully, an attitude of ceaseless agitation to bring about reform by non-violent and constitutional methods. Though most of the agrarian movements in India are confined relatively to the provinces within which they have arisen, yet certain characteristics appear to be fairly general in the midst of the varying contents of its demand. But it is necessary to point out that at present there is a great danger of revolutionary infection on account of the apathy of the state towards these movements and the delay in the appeasement of the agrarian rage by a peaceful settlement of their legitimate demands.

*The Kisan Movement in the United Provinces:* The first signs of rural discontent had been witnessed as early as 1922 when the *Kisan Sanghs* were organised to combat the tyrannies of the *Taluqdars* of Oudh. On account of the repressive policy of the Government and the atrocities of the police, the movement had to be suspended. But the hatred against the *Zamindars* was silently fermenting in the hearts of the *Kisans*. The wave of Socialism made the agricultural-workers conscious of their struggle for freedom and the mass movement of the National Congress once again created an excellent atmosphere for the revival of the Kisan movement. The peasant unions became aggressive after a chequered history of about a decade and evoked great hopes in the heart of revolutionaries. In 1930 when the Congress launched the Civil Disobedience campaign, the Provincial Congressmen naturally lashed the peasantry into political action. To them the political crisis had meant "Freedom from the hated zamindar", "no rent campaign", and solution of their most important economic demands with the support of the Congress. The ceaseless agitation of the U. P. peasants demanding the scaling down of rents in proportion to the fall in prices since 1929, resulted in Mahatma Gandhi's talk with Lord Wellington at Simla in 1931, and consequently rent reductions were ordered by the Government amounting to nearly four crores of rupees.

In 1935 Babu Purshottam Das Tandon formally organized an independent Kisan Sabha which was manned by Congressmen, who had good contacts with village *Kisans*. At the first Provincial Conference in the same year, the Kisan Sabha decided in favour of the abolition of the zamindari system. In June 1937 the Provincial Congress Committee intensified its rural contact programme which gave a great impetus to the Kisan movement. District Kisan Sabhas were organized to carry on agitation on long standing demands, and in July 1938 the U. P. Kisan Committee presented the *Kisans'* case

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before the Rent and Tenancy Enquiry Committee of the U. P. Government.<sup>4</sup>

The U. P. Kisan Committee organized "Kisan Conferences," "Kisan Marches", and "Kisan Days". To-day the Kisan Sabhas function in about 25 districts and the membership, which is at present over 60,000 is increasing at a rapid rate.<sup>5</sup> In April 1938 a mammoth demonstration was held by 80,000 peasants before the Legislative Assembly at Lucknow to ask the Congress Ministry to implement their election promises. Their minimum demands were the wiping off of rents in arrears, repudiation of all debts to money-lenders, fifty-per cent. reduction in rent, permanency of tenure and the retention of their title in the cultivation of 'Sir' lands, abolition of *Hari* and *Begar*, remission of canal rates, and cessation of ejections of tenants from land and house-sites. The failure of the Congress Party to give permanent relief to the Kisans and their pact with the Taluqdars on the U. P. Tenancy Bill, had aroused much suspicion and anger amongst the Kisan Sabhaites. The Kisan movement has now been split up into two groups: the Kisan Sabha and the Kisan Sangh. The former is an independent and reformist body while the latter, being inclined towards socialism, is highly revolutionary.

(a) *The Kisan Sabha* is a peaceful and constitutional association of cultivators in almost all districts of the Province. Villages with a population of a thousand or more have a Sabha on strictly democratic lines. These Village Sabhas are affiliated to the District Sabhas which are ultimately responsible to the Provincial Sabha. This organization has received national approval because it is purely economic and social in its programme, non-violent and parliamentary in its method, and nationalistic in its outlook. It has intimate relations and active co-operation with the Congress, and seeks to achieve its end by legislation through the support of the Congress Assembly Party. It is contented with piecemeal legislation and believes more in reformation by an evolutionary, rather than a revolutionary, process.

(b) *The Kisan Sangh* is purely a political body with an aggressive socialist programme. It seeks the support of the Congress but has an independent organization of its own. Its programme is *first*, the achievement of complete independence in the sense of separation from the British Empire, and the establishment of a socialist society; and *second*, the

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<sup>4</sup>Ranga: History of Kisan Movement, All-India Kisan Publication, 1938, pp. 99-104.

<sup>5</sup>Annual Report of the U. P. Kisan Sabha, 1937.

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development of the economic life of the country planned and controlled by the state as in Russia. It is the firm belief of the members of this movement that economic reconstruction of the country is impossible without the attainment of complete Swaraj. This movement has come to be associated with the Congress Socialist Party and therefore, it has soon become strong in those rural areas where the radical socialist element is strong. "All Power to the Masses", is their chief slogan—hence the demand for the wholesale expropriation of the landlords. It should be noted that almost all the members of this movement are enlisted from the ranks of the landless and unspecified field-workers who have an instinctive hatred for the propertied class, and who are most susceptible to the gospel of socialist appeal. It is to the credit of this group of "have-nots" that bazar lootings, grain-riots and kisan-zamindar clashes have become things of everyday occurrence. The combination of this pseudo-revolutionary element is really very dangerous, and is causing grave concern in political circles, and if their energies are not controlled and directed into desirable channels, they will fester and bring about a bloody revolution.

*The Kisan Sabhas of Bihar:* The great mass contact programme of the Congress developed a real fighting strength among the *Kisans* of Bihar for redressing their own grievances. In 1926 the socialist propaganda resulted in their organization of the Kisan Sabha which presented a memorandum to the All-Parties' Conference in 1928. Nothing is known of the activities and achievements of this Sabha from 1928-1934, because its activities were suppressed by the Government and its papers confiscated by the police during the Civil Disobedience Movement in 1930. It was on the advent of Swami Sahajanand Saraswati that the real Kisan movement began in Bihar in 1934.<sup>6</sup> Just about the same time the emergence of the Congress Socialist Party added zest to the movement. By 1936 the Kisan Sabha had made giant strides and launched a scheme of wholesale expropriation of the zamindars. This resulted in the passing of the Tenancy Bill in 1936, conferring in part permanency of tenure on some tenants and relieving others from some of the worst abuses and burdens. The progress of the Kisan Sabha continued unabated and in May 1938 it was the biggest Sabha in India with a membership of 2,50,000 Kisans.<sup>7</sup>

The Bihar Kisan Sabha has achieved marvellous success during the past few years by combating tooth and nail against the zamin-

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<sup>6</sup>Report of Bihar Kisan Sabha, submitted to the A.-I. K. C. for 1937  
<sup>7</sup>Ranga, op. cit., p. 84.

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dars and their *âmlās* (agents). In 1937 it presented a manifesto of 35 immediate demands to the Congress Ministry, most important of which were the drastic reduction in land and water rates, returning of 'bakashṭ' lands to the original tillers of the soil, abolition of the system of rent and wages in kind, protection of the ryot from imprisonment and his homestead from attachment in evacuation of a decree for arrears of rent. On September 1, 1937, about two thousand meetings were held in different parts of the province, and mass demonstrations were held before the Assembly. But unfortunately, the Congress Ministry, that had been raised to power on the shoulders of the peasantry introduced a Revised Tenancy Bill, which appeared only to satisfy a portion of the peasants' misery and fell short of the pledges given to them. The Ministry was accused of siding with the zamindars. The notorious pact of December 14, 1937 between the Congress and Zamindars opened a wide gap between the Bihar Kisan Sabha and the Provincial Congress Committee. This ultimately led to the separation of the Kisan Sabha and its independence as an organization. In July 1938, the Bihar Kisan Council passed a resolution condemning the Congress-Zamindar Agreement, denouncing the Congress Ministry and reaffirming the right of the Kisans to organize themselves in independent peasant unions. It further resolved to carry on a raging and tearing propaganda against the zamindars and the Congress ministry until their grievances were satisfied and their minimum demands fulfilled. The Bihar Sabha has now grown into a powerful political party and its detachment from the Congress group may presage a serious political disaster that the Congress may have to face in the near future.

*The Krishak-Proja Party in Bengal:* The Bengal Krishak Sabha was organized in 1931 by some of the Congressmen for the purpose of saving Kisans from the oppression of zamindars, but owing to the repressive policy of the Government the movement had to subside for the time being. In 1934 another movement fostered especially by Mahomedan Kisans was organized under the name and style of "The Proja Party of Bengal." Later on when the scheduled caste people also joined it and the socialist-minded youth captured several of its branches and a part of its leadership, it changed its name into Krishak-Proja Party and adopted a radical agrarian programme. The movement is now led by an organization called the All-Bengal Krishak-Proja Party. The inception of the movement is due largely to the desire of the tenantry of Bengal to become free peasant-proprietors, and a genuine interest in the economic and social uplift of the masses. It is purely economic, non-violent and parliamentary in its programme. It was felt that on account of the present defective agrarian system, depreciation in the price of agricultural produce,

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indebtedness, illiteracy, extravagance and litigiousness, the condition of the peasantry was desperate and no amount of good-will could remedy the condition. Therefore these circumstances had to be combated independently and changed or reformed by constitutional methods. In 1936 Mr. Fazl-ul-Haq, the leader of the movement adopted portions of the All-India Kisan Sabha's manifesto and declared himself in favour of the abolition of the zamindari system. This contributed most to the triumph of the Krishak-Proja Party in the 1937 general elections, and now it has become the most powerful political force in Bengal and the first well-organized parliamentary party of Kisans in the whole of India, even though it represents some communities of the peasants of the province only.<sup>8</sup>

The programme before the Krishak-Proja Party is as follows:—

- (a) The permanent settlement to be abolished. Permanence of proprietorship to be transferred from the landlords to the cultivators.
- (b) Land to be parcelled out in economic holdings and only actual cultivators to be given proprietary rights.
- (c) *Nazrana*, *begar* and *serfdom* to be totally done away with.
- (d) The standard of living of the masses to be raised.
- (e) The party to remain purely non-communal and follow the constitutional method to implement the programme.

The movement is, as it is, fraught with serious drawbacks. There is a great opposition from the land-owning classes in and outside the legislature, and the Government's unfounded apprehension of socialism persuades it to prevent the legislation of any such change and to retain the support of the landed aristocracy. Secondly, as most of the Zamindars are Hindus, they want the retention of the permanent settlement which would enable their minority Hindu population to maintain a high political and economic status in the province. Thirdly, the Muslim League considers the movement contrary to Islamic principles and has therefore launched a defeatist propaganda against it. Of course, like all other infant organizations, this movement is suffering from lack of funds and able leadership, but it would not take long to align the sympathies of the masses if the movement can successfully pilot through even a part of its programme. With the majority of seats in the Lower House and the weight of insistence of the masses behind it, the Krishak-Proja Party can easily put the Governor in an embarrassingly yielding position. It can also, as the last resort, achieve its end by threatening the Government by coalescing with the Congress Socialist Party and turning into a revolutionary movement.

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<sup>8</sup>Ranga: Peasants and Congress, All-India Kisan Sabha Publication, Madras, 1938, pp. 26-27.

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The Proja Party organization is a reformist movement. It is moderate, considerate and very cautious in its constitutional methods. It did not attempt through hasty measures to impose a scheme of destruction and construction all on a sudden which frightens even the sympathetic opponents. Its object was to reach its goal through piecemeal legislation which is both lengthy and risky, because the original thoroughness and intention of the scheme is apt to be pervertedly moderated or even forgotten in course of legislation or the party may lose all powers inside the legislature. The Proja Party has now exhausted the patience of the masses because it has not only failed to improve their economic and social condition but also to carry out even a part of the programme for which it was originally formed.

*Khet-Mazdoor Unions:* The first attempts to organize landless agricultural workers into independent unions was made in Andhra and Bihar as late as 1923. But the movement could not be placed on a sound footing because the workers, who are mainly poor and low caste people, lacked political consciousness and firmness to withstand the influence of their employers and the Government. When in 1926 the British Government raised the bogey of depressed classes as an objection to granting Swaraj, the problem received serious consideration at the hands of Congress leaders. Since then Mahatma Gandhi has been devoting his attention to the uplift of the Harijans, who constitute the bulk of field workers, and the Congress has been carrying on a stupendous propaganda for mass education and political awakening of the lower strata of humanity. But the Congress ministries have done almost nothing for this class of agricultural labourers, which may safely be attributed to the political failure of the Labour and Harijan representatives in the Lower House. Only the Madras Government has organized a Labour Department and devoted most of its attention to the welfare of landless workers by establishing special labour schools, constructing model hamlets and providing a number of scholarships for vocational training. In Bombay, the Labour Department has paid more attention to urban and industrial labour. The Bihar and the U. P. Governments have now taken up this matter seriously and their activities in this direction will be awaited with interest.

It is entirely to the credit of socialist workers that Khet-Mazdoor Unions have sprung up all over India. The Khet-Mazdoors represent a neglected class of landless and unspecified agricultural labourers who are exposed most to the atrocities of the employers. It is these workers who are subjected to serfdom and *begar*, and live on the lowest rung of the economic ladder. They are exploited both by the kisan and zamindar employers and their unmitigated sufferings

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are too strong for words. They are protected neither by Kisan Sabhas nor the Congress, because the former are preoccupied with the primary needs of kisans, while the latter is exploiting them for political ends without meeting even their minimum demands.<sup>9</sup> These workers have now realized that freedom from exploitation and oppression is not possible without organizing themselves into strong Unions to fight for their rights.

The demands of Khet-Mazdoor Unions, though not revolutionary, are framed and presented in such a way as to cause immediate inconvenience and impediment to the local aggressive kisan movement. While the kisans demand permanency of tenure and peasant proprietorship, the Khet-Mazdoors want to become cultivators of all 'Sikmy' land. The Khet-Mazdoor Union of Bihar, in August, 1937, passed a vote of no-confidence in the Provincial Kisan Sabha, and pressed the following demands:—Abolition of all forms of serfdom, *Hari* and *Begar*; supply of house-sites by the employers and protection against ejection from such sites; increase in the rate of wages, which should be equal to that of industrial workers; employment of ploughmen by registration, on paying an annual salary of Rs. 48/- with two meals per working day; the right to cultivate free of rent 1/12 (one-twelfth) of the employer's land. The Mazdoor Unions of Oudh demand the regulation of hours and conditions of work, permanency of employment, payment of wages by hour in the case of women and children and their protection by special legislation, equality of wages for rural and urban workers, free house sites provided by employers, provision for organized recreation by the state, and the establishment of a Rural Labour Control Board to direct and supervise the activities of various labour departments. The charter of minimum demands which the Andhra Agricultural Labour Union has published contains only those demands which the peasants are capable of and willing to implement without much difficulty or obstruction, i.e. to oppose wrong measures and forced labour, to denounce social ill-treatment, to put down bribery; to demand free education, rights for free supply of fuel and fodder, free house sites, unemployment and sickness relief, minimum number of paid holidays for permanent servants, cancellation of existing debts, and the sanction of Government lands for landless workers.

Whether the existence of Khet-Mazdoor Sabhas is a source of strength to the Kisan Sabhas is a controversial question. In Bihar and Oudh, although most of the landless workers are members of the Kisan Sabhas, there is a move to organize independent Mazdoor Unions which will have no connection either with the Kisan Sabhas

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<sup>9</sup> Ranga: Kisan Hand Book, 1938, pp. 100-103.

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or other Congress and Ryot Associations. At present one-third of the total agriculturists are landless workers, having no greater stake in land than their meagre and insufficient wages. The nature of their problems must needs be different from those of owner-cultivators or tenant-cultivators, and this is sufficient to justify their separate organization. The Andhra Kisan Sabha favours the independent organization of landless field workers' unions wherever there is a sufficient number of workers to develop them, because real welfare and uplift of Kisans can be furthered in the measure in which their social and economic conditions are likely to rise. It supports the complete co-operation of these Sabhas because their economic interests and political aspirations are ultimately the same. Therefore, due to the efforts of Ranga and Giri, the South Indian Federation of Peasants and Workers was organised in 1935, to which were affiliated all Kisan Sabhas, Khet-Mazdoor Unions, and other labour organizations of the Andhra Province. The efforts of the All-India Kisan Sabha are now directed towards bridging the gulf between the Kisan and Mazdoor Sabhas. It has been made clear that as the Kisans are able to gain more and more concessions from the vested interests, and relief from the Provincial Governments, either in the way of reduction of rents, or in the shape of greater legal rights against zamindars and money-lenders, they should in their turn make more concessions to agricultural workers. The lot of kisans can never improve unless they recognize the rights and privileges of the field workers on whose labour depends their prosperity. The Kisan Sabhas will be considerably weakened without the co-operation of the Khet-Mazdoor Unions, and the latter will not be able to achieve much success without the sympathies and support of the latter.<sup>10</sup>

*A Central Agrarian Party for India:* A brief survey of the agrarian movements in India shows that the existence of many organizations, working independently with their conflicting programmes, is not in the best interests of the country. There is need for the organization of a Central National Agrarian Party to co-ordinate the efforts of its constituent unions and chalk out a common programme which should be approved by all. In 1935 an All-India Kisan Sabha was organized to unite the Kisan Sabhas of various provinces. An All-India platform was created by forming a "Peasant Group of M.L.A.'s" in the Central Assembly under the leadership of Mr. N. G. Ranga.<sup>11</sup> But this organization was disapproved by the Indian National Congress because it felt, and rightly so, that this movement had become a rival of the Congress competing for the ryots, and by the Khet-

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<sup>10</sup>Peasants and Congress, op. cit. Chapter III, 1938, p. 22.

<sup>11</sup>History of Kisan Movement, op. cit. p. 60.



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Mazdoor Unions, because the Kisan Organizations had failed to espouse the cause of landless workers. The reports of various provincial Congress Committees pointed to the fact that the time was not ripe for the creation of such an All-India Organization, and that it was more proper to let the Kisan Sabhas grow from below, instead of foisting an All-India Organization from above. To stem the tide of this movement the Congress established an All-India Kisan Congress as the supreme Kisan Organization in the country. In 1936 two committees were appointed, i.e. the Mass Contact Committee and the Agrarian Sub-Committee, whose function was to establish and maintain healthy co-operation between the Kisans and the Congress and to conduct economic enquiries into the condition of peasants and to formulate their proposals for their improvement.

During the general elections in 1937 the Congress candidates took advantage of the Kisan Movement's support by pledging themselves to do everything possible to make the attitude of the Congress Assembly Party more and more favourable to the Kisans. But early in 1938 the failure of the Congress ministries to do anything effective to help the Kisans, the adoption of the red flag by the Kisan Sabha, the agitation against the Congress-Zamindar pact in Bihar, led to the separation of the All-India Kisan Sabha from the fold of the Congress. Although this movement is functioning in 15 Provinces and States and embraces about 7,20,000 members,<sup>12</sup> it is not a representative central organization for all Kisan, Mazdoor and other Ryot Associations existing in India. Therefore each province should have a Provincial Agrarian Party which would supervise, control and consolidate the interests of all these associations of agricultural workers to form a united front in the Lower House. It would be affiliated to the All-India National Agrarian Party. The programme of the Provincial Agrarian Parties will be to capture the majority of seats in the Provincial Council, carry through agrarian reforms by planned legislation, raise the standard of living of the rural masses, and introduce constructive schemes to be adopted and implemented by provincial governments.

The All-India National Agrarian Party shall consolidate the interests of Provincial Agrarian Parties, and by capturing the majority of seats in the Central Assembly become a formidable political power. Its task shall be to deepen the concept of agrarianism and to build an edifice of agrarian philosophy, to show that in India, as in every other country, the peasant is the creative element of the nation. Through the vote it shall try to seize the power, to influence

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<sup>12</sup>Kisan Movement, op. cit., 1938, p. 84.

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the legislators, and by taking the Government in its own hands pass laws for the reduction or abolition of duties that hinder rural operations and foreign trade.

*State and Organization:* The growth and development of the agrarian movement in India seems to be only recent. But the characteristics of rural local political organizations in various places and at various times have been similar. In isolated rural aggregates the organization is an extension of familism to the entire rural community. With the growing complexity of rural society, the encroachment of urban over rural interests, and the engulfment of the rural community by the larger political body, i.e. the state, the elements of familistic democracy, based on mores, have naturally been fading. Increased interference by state authorities in the control of rural affairs has decreased rural autonomy, and the regime of familistic democracy has been replaced by the compulsory regime of state officialdom. However, even under such circumstances the elements of familistic democracy have rarely been erased entirely.

With the decline of the rural political autonomy, and the diminished isolation of the rural community, the agricultural labourers began to participate more actively in national politics. Peasant Political Unions were organized and the complex machinery of political propaganda and influence was created. But their activities were suppressed by the Government. In its effort to please the vested interests, the state has more often crippled the zeal of the rural masses and maintained them in a state of serfdom. During the first three decades of the twentieth century the Government pursued a policy which was not only unsympathetic to these Unions but definitely harmful. In 1926 the Government of India passed the Factory Act but it took care not to extend it to agriculture, and the I. L. O's feeble attempt to control forced labour was frustrated by the Central Government. In 1928 the Royal Agricultural Commission recommended economic protection to agricultural workers which never materialized. In 1929 the Whitley Commission on Labour completely ignored the rights of agricultural workers for protection through state intervention. In 1931 the Third I. L. Conference considered the adaptation of the Washington Draft Convention on agricultural labourers, but received no encouragement from the Government of India, and since 1935 the efforts of Mr. Ranga have been abortive because neither the Government nor the legislators have realized the extreme necessity of protecting this class of the rural community.

It seems that the period of passive participation of the peasant class is over and the rural masses have now arisen to the necessity of self-determination. The agricultural classes have come to realize

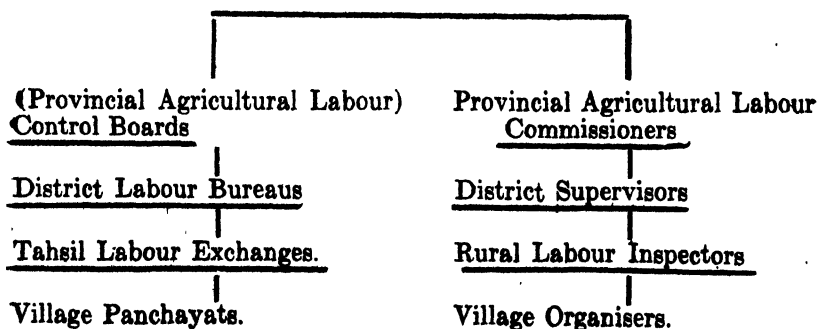
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that they will have to take an active part in national politics and play the game with the same modern technique as the urban groups. The aggressive and socialist character of rural uprisings are evident everywhere in India. They have burst forth like thunderstorms from excessive suffering and the impossibility of bearing the existing conditions any longer. The attack is directed against the zamindars, and they are ready to sacrifice all other interests in life in order to gain liberation from this servitude.

There is, therefore, the need for the reorientation of the policy of the state. The existence of many organizations among the rural class is a manifestation of the realization of the agriculturists that it is not only in material interests but also in mentality and conceptions of life that they should organize like their industrial confreres. The cold attitude of the Government should be transformed into warm support and co-operation in the name of national well-being and welfare. The immediate task before the Central Government is the establishment of a Central Rural Labour Control Board, co-ordination of the work of this department with the Rural Development and the Co-operative Departments; co-operation with the Imperial Council of Agricultural Research and the Industrial Labour Control Board; and the appointment of a Royal Commission on Agricultural Labour, which is now overdue, because social economic planning in the field of labour cannot be done without the aid of expert opinion.

A provisional scheme for the establishment of the Rural Labour Department has been drawn up as follows:—

### Central Rural Labour Control Board with the Government of India.



The village organizers shall be appointed by the Panchayats and their duties shall be to organize agricultural workers into Sabhas and

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present their grievances to Tahsil and District Sabhas. The Tahsil and District Labour Exchanges and Bureaus shall be controlled by their respective Sabhas and supervised by Rural Labour Inspectors and District Supervisors. Their most important function will be to distribute surplus labour power from one region to another where the supply is short, and report cases of abuse by the employers to the District Sabhas for necessary action. The Provincial Boards shall be under the Rural Labour Commissioners and controlled by the Provincial Sabhas. Their function shall be to co-ordinate the work of Tahsil and District Sabhas and to recommend to the Government to pass such legislation and enforce such laws as are most urgent and in the best interest of the province. The whole machinery of Rural Labour Organisation shall be under the control of the Central Rural Labour Control Board with the Government of India, which would look to the interests of the agricultural labourers both from the national and international points of view. The Provincial Governments shall be required to defray the preliminary expenses for the establishment of these departments and pay the salaries of the Labour Officers, while the Panchayats and respective Sabhas shall meet the maintenance charges.

The State should not only recognize the importance of the Rural Labour Organizations but render every possible aid by revising land and tariff policies, imparting technical education, giving legislative protection, and rendering financial assistance, technical aid and expert advice. The agrarian movement in India is not only an expression of a unique political movement but also of national movement that is tending wholly to regenerate the community and cultural life around the institution of land. Its political task is to open the way to new cultural aspirations and to guide the nation toward the path that leads to the realization of the magnificent ideals of the future which now appear to be surrounded by insurmountable obstacles. The success of the Agrarian Movement in India will depend on how far the resources of the Government and the community can be patiently mobilized, and to what extent the state is willing to recognize and satisfy the urgent demands of the rural proletariat

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## CHAPTER XIII.

### LABOUR LEGISLATION AND SOCIAL REFORM

*The Need for Planned Labour Legislation:* All the signs of the times point to the rapid extension of a comprehensive programme of social and economic reconstruction. But before taking action in this direction we have to recognize the necessity for National Planning with a view to controlling and co-ordinating the labour power for effective production, and the improvement in the purchasing capacity of the agricultural masses who constitute the bulk of consumers. Planning in the field of agricultural labour implies state supervision and control of agricultural production ; adjustment of labour power in complete co-operation with other branches of agriculture and co-operating groups of industries ; and the rational distribution of income between different sections of producers and workers, focussing upon a higher standard of living. Therefore, economic planning is concerned not only with the productive employment of labour power and the conditions of work, but also inevitably with the conditions of living.<sup>1</sup>

The problems involved in a scheme of national planning for agricultural workers in India would be—the adjustment of labour power, both skilled and unskilled, among various branches of agriculture, and the distribution of surplus labour, set free as a result of seasonal changes in agriculture, to various regional and seasonal industries ; specialized training of workers in accordance with the equipment they have to handle and the work they have to perform ; regulation of wages, hours and conditions of work for the various categories of labour ; the increase of labour productivity and the improvement of technique in order to better the general welfare of the workers ; the elaboration and execution of a programme of health and safety measures ; and the creation of a healthy and wholesome atmosphere for social and cultural enlightenment for the making of better citizens. It should be borne in mind that planning should be conceived from National and Regional points of view, and in the solution of these problems it should also enlist the co-operation of expert technicians.

In the U. S. S. R. the planned system of agricultural labour organization is based upon the fact that the workers are conscious that

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<sup>1</sup>V. V. Obolensky—Ossinsky: "The Nature and Forms of Social Economic Planning", Presidential Address, World Social Economic Planning Conference, 1931, Hague. (Report, p. 291).

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they toil only for themselves, and that they are not only producers but also organizers of production. This social planning has not only introduced a large number of idle workers into productive labour but has steadily improved their skill, resulting in a constant improvement in their material welfare and general living conditions, and in a steady rise in their cultural level. "The Socialist forms of Labour Organisations are producing", in the words of Stalin, "a radical change in man's attitude towards labour, transforming labour from the shameful and heavy burden it was once considered to be into a thing of honour and glory."<sup>2</sup> The success of Social Planning in Soviet Russia is the defeat of capitalist planning in other countries of the world. It has not only banished agricultural unemployment and wastage of labour power but has greatly improved the economic condition of the agricultural workers. Therefore, without advocating the principles of communism for India, we cannot refrain from suggesting a compromise between Indian capitalism and Russian Socialism. "In our national economy there must be room for small farmers and small artisans helped by co-operative societies with State-owned and State-managed public utility services and State-controlled large-scale industries. The interests of both the consumers and the small-scale producers like the ryot and the artisan should be guaranteed by fixing prices, rates of interest and rent, and providing marketing facilities."<sup>3</sup> The policy of *laissez-faire* followed in Indian agriculture is essentially a capitalist policy, which subordinates the essential interests of the workers, resulting in much misery and discontent. The agrarian problems, due to the timidity of the Government and the tyranny of the capitalist organizers (landlords), have assumed a dangerous attitude, and without adequate state intervention in the form of a National Labour Legislation, a crisis of the first magnitude cannot be averted.

But mere legislation to secure the objectives is not enough, because all legislation is sterile and a dead letter without social reform. Therefore social reform must prepare ground for the successful introduction of planned legislation. Pure legislation is based on contractual relationship and enlarges the gulf between the landlord and the tenant, the employer and the field-worker, the master and the serf. But social reform, by inculcating higher ideals of citizenship and mutual goodwill upon all the people, will bring the human element into play. Social effort, whether of individuals or private organiza-

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<sup>2</sup>I. A. Kravál: "Labour in Soviet Planned Economy", Report of the World Social Economic Planning Conference, 'I. R. L.', p. 400.

D. T. Shastri: "Economic Planning", "The Leader", Jan., 7, 1939.

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tions, has often resulted in a harmonious settlement of the rural problems in several countries of the world, and the Rural Social Organizations of Ancient India bear ample testimony to this fact.

There are at present three efficacious means which can be employed to work out a system of planned social and economic reconstruction, i.e., Mutual Agreements and Moral Suasion; A strong Public Opinion, cultivated and strengthened by the sustained and organized efforts of workers' organizations and private institutions; and the enforcement of Planned Social Legislation:—

(a) Mutual Agreements between the employers and employees, moral suasion, and social effort of private institutions are of great help in the settlement of agrarian problems of local nature. The solution of the problems is left to the negotiation of agreements between the parties primarily interested. In Denmark, Mutual Agreement Societies have done pioneer work in regulating the hours and conditions of work in agriculture. Similarly in Norway, Sweden and Poland, Collective Agreements made between the organizations of the employers and employees, have not only regulated the conditions of employment in agriculture but proved instrumental in raising the economic condition of the agricultural workers by means of social legislation.<sup>4</sup> In ancient India the Village Panchayats were the chief mediators in bringing about such agreements between the employers and the employees. Their place has now been taken up by the Christian Missionary Organizations and the Congress Rural Leagues. But their efforts have often been imbued with religious or political motives, thus giving rise to mutual suspicion and distrust. Moreover, the relations between the employer and the employed have been so much strained during the past few decades, that the employment of this means of social reform has become ineffective.

(b) Public opinion in rural communities is very powerful on matters which concern the home, the occupation and enterprise of farming, and the integrity of these two dominating rural interests.<sup>5</sup> Since its action is quickest where the public is concerned with the major interest of the country, it can serve as a potent force in solving many agrarian problems of India. The increasing favourableness of public opinion is a consequence of the waning faith in the doctrine of individualism, and is a part of the growing sentiment in favour of Social Legislation.<sup>6</sup>

Public opinion can be created both by a system of diffused mass education and scientific propaganda. But in a country like India

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<sup>4</sup>Reports on Agricultural Labour, I.L.O., Report II, pp. 37-71.

<sup>5</sup>Taylor: Rural Sociology, p. 477.

<sup>6</sup>Weyforth: Organisation of Labour, p. 243.

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where education has failed to reach the masses, and vested interests have systematically prejudiced all efforts towards rural uplift, the only agencies at present are the State and the Academic workers. The state has influenced economic opinion by the publication of a variety of manuals and reports, appointment of Commissions from time to time and by various other important pronouncements and undertakings. But unfortunately these findings very often reflect the set notions dictated by political and imperial interests. Hence the danger of cultivating biased opinions and wrong diagnosis of the social and economic ills which lie obscure in all parts of the country. The limitations of academic workers, for the larger purpose which I am contemplating, are too conspicuous. Unlike the case in Western countries, the facilities and resources for organized and scientific research in India are poor, and the absence of trained staff has made matters worse. Handicapped by these disabilities, and confronted with innumerable complex internal problems, the amount and quality of work produced is negligent, hence the absence of effective economic opinion. With an unusually large population and acute economic and social problems, it is absolutely necessary to have specialists in each branch of economic study. There is further required a constant process of actions and reactions between official and independent academic investigators, criticizing each other's point of view, for the establishment of truth. By undertaking a comprehensive programme of rural research, and the investigation of important problems of the country, academic work will not only supplement Government publications and cover fields wholly ignored by official investigations, but will adequately meet the demand for public enquiry and afford an intelligent corrective data to opinion made current by those in power.<sup>7</sup>

Therefore in contemplating the formation of a sound public opinion our purpose has been twofold: first, to create an economic consciousness among the masses, and to prepare ground for the introduction of new agrarian and social reforms; and second, to provide ways and means for the working out of the reforms most effectively, because it is impossible for the reformer to proceed without the experience which has already been secured by the people concerned. Without a sound and stable opinion, legal measures proceed with an ineffective background and social reforms become futile.

(c) There is always a stage in the development of the economic life of a country when state intervention becomes unavoidable, because the function of the state is not simply to protect natural

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<sup>7</sup>Prof. C. N. Vakil, "The Formation of Economic Opinion in India", Presidential Address, 18th Indian Economic Conference, Patna, 1934.



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and civic rights, but it is charged with the obligation of promoting economic prosperity and social welfare. If public opinion can be brought to bear with increasing force upon the tasks which confront the Governments, and if that public opinion can be animated by the Social Will to apply to all policies the test of their effect upon standards of living, then it will be possible at once to make use of technical skill—in its bearing upon these problems. The present problem of agricultural labourers in India has advanced beyond the scope of mere social reform, therefore, social legislation will have to be enforced to give a practical shape to the whole scheme. But any scheme of social legislation in India will be confronted with insuperable obstacles to real and effective reform; hence, in contemplating a scheme of Planned Agricultural Labour Legislation for India, it will be necessary to take the following precautions:—

(i) Where the problems are complex and where legislation has to deal with diverse conditions of a very technical nature, the legislator must not proceed without expert opinion.

(ii) These reforms should be brought about gradually and systematically by piecemeal legislation. Hasty and 'a priori' conclusions in complete disregard of realities are both wasteful and dangerous.

(iii) Agrarian legislation should be in the nature of a positive and constructive advance and not in the nature of merely negative acts of protection and prohibition.

(iv) It will be necessary to frame all agrarian legislation on the basis of national laws to meet all the diverse circumstances and special conditions which exist in this country. It should not subject agricultural conditions to the same rigid type of regulation which is possible in industry.

(v) It has been the general experience that agrarian legislation is best founded on a body of agreed practice already worked out by the organizations concerned. But in the domain of agriculture that experience, at all events to a sufficiently wide extent, is lacking, because organization in Indian agriculture has up to the present remained far behind the organization in industry. Therefore, we have, *first*, to establish and strengthen Agricultural Workers' Organizations; and *second*, to draw lessons from the experience of other countries.

*The Regulation of Hired Help:* An important step in the prevention of exploitation of landless labourers and the protection of peasant proprietorship from degeneration would lie in the direction of regulating the employment of paid labour on the fields. Unless there is a restriction and even prohibition of the employment of hired help, the

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condition of the labourer will tend to deteriorate, and there will be hardly any possibility of checking the undue exploitation. The Russian Agrarian Code permits the employment of paid labour in cases where the farm cannot, in view of its working capacity and equipment, carry out the necessary work in proper time, and paid labour is permitted on the clear understanding that the labour contract is strictly observed by the farm, that is, the condition that all the able-bodied members of the farming family work at the same rates as the day labourers. Where there is little arable land, paid labour is definitely allowed on farms temporarily left without cultivators, on the other farms only for seasonal work, when there are not enough hands on the farm to complete the work, i.e. at harvest time. On the other hand where arable land is abundant, or when farms are being started in new districts in consequence of redistribution or migration, paid labour is allowed to the extent necessary for bringing the land quickly under cultivation and utilizing to its fullest extent the cultivable area.<sup>a</sup> The regulation of hired help in India demands consideration, especially where the low-caste hirelings are required to cultivate the 'Sir' land or the "*Khūd-Kāsh*" of the big landlords, or to reclaim forests and cultivate the land of absentee zamindars under the supervision of their agents. Adult male labour should be allowed to work as tenants-at-will, and to perform all and sundry operations in agriculture, provided the laws regulating hired workers are strictly observed, but woman and child labour should be allowed only during the busy seasons and under special protection. An effective system of regulation can be found in the organization of Labour Exchanges and Employment Bureaus, which will help in the periodical transfer of agricultural workers from one group to another, and guide their flow to places where there is greater effective demand. The employment of permanent workers, and of seasonal workers in groups, shall be carried on through the Agricultural Labour Employment Bureaus and be subject to the following conditions:—That cultivators with uneconomic holdings shall be allowed only casual help; that no hired help shall be allowed for the cultivation of the "Sir" land; that hirelings cultivating the land of absentee landlords shall assume the right of tenants-at-will; that cultivators with more than 3 acres, considered to be an economic holding for India, shall be allowed only as much hired help as can be maintained at least for one season; that hired labourers employed continuously for two seasons (harvesting of the *Kharif* and *Rabi*) shall be considered as permanent workers and paid for the whole year; that all cultivators, cultivating more than 3 acres, and employing hired workers, shall maintain a

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<sup>a</sup>Acherksinsky, "Agrarian Policy in Soviet Russia", quoted by Mukerji, op. cit. p. 216.

## AGRICULTURAL LABOUR CONDITIONS IN NORTHERN INDIA

register of employment as prescribed by the Rural Labour Inspector; that the record of all workers cultivating the land of absentee landlords, or the '*Khûd-Kâsh*' of big landlords, shall be maintained by the Agricultural Labour Employment Bureaus; and that all employers of hired help shall be subject to the inspection of Rural Labour Officers at any time during the year.

*Hours of Work:* The agricultural labourer always grumbles that the field-working day is excessively long. In the industrial area the eight-hour-day is becoming common, but this is not possible on the farm due to the varied conditions of seasonal work. In the rush of season the long day of field work entails much fatigue and wastage of energy. Moreover, the hired hands suffer from poor living conditions and harsh treatment, and instances are not rare when even the day's leisure is to be foregone.

There is no rule to regulate the number of hours a labourer has to work, and usage and custom fail to exercise an effective control. Everywhere hours are adjusted to summer and winter conditions and, of course, in consideration of the volume of work waiting to be completed on the field. In Bengal, the hours of work for field-workers are from 6 A. M. to 1 P. M., and again from 3 P. M. to 6 P. M. In Bihar and Orissa, the field-workers are required to work from sunrise to sunset with an interval not exceeding one hour for the midday meal. In the eastern districts of the U. P., the agricultural labourer has to work from 5 A. M. to 1 P. M., and again from 2 P. M. to 10 P. M., in the busy season, while instances are not wanting where the labourer has to put in about 20 working hours on the farm. During the winter season, work usually begins at 8 A. M., and finishes at 5 P. M. On an average, the working hours of agricultural labourers in these provinces are usually from 6 A. M. to 6 P. M. with an hour's interval in the afternoon. In other words, the workers have to put in at least eleven hours' work on the field. Moreover, the time is regulated by sunrise and sunset, and therefore, not only is this working period longer in the summer months than in winter, but there is always the temptation on the part of the employers to exploit the labourers for longer hours. During the busy seasons night work becomes very common, and especially so when the crops are lying in the open fields after the harvest and require constant watching. In Bengal an extra allowance of one rupee is given for guarding the crops at night, while in Bihar and Chota Nagpur this work is entrusted to the *kamias*. In Oudh, specially in the submontane districts, the watching of crops at night is a necessary and implied condition of employment.

The plight of the agricultural serf is always lost sight of in view of the fact that he is a twenty-four-hour servant of the master. In

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Bihar and Chota Nagpur a Kamia works on the field from 4 A.M. to 12 A.M. when he is given the noon meal. He is allowed no leisure in the afternoon, but has to go to the jungle to fetch fuel-wood and fodder. In the evening he has to look after the cattle and do household work for his master, while at night he has to sleep in front of his master's house like a faithful watch-dog. It has been brought to light that during the sowing and harvesting seasons he has sometimes to forego his sleep for a few days lest the master's work should suffer. Just as a Kamia has no specifically limited task to perform, so there is no time-limit to his work. He has to work as and when the necessity for his services arises, irrespective of the seasonal conditions, the hour of the day, or the nature and conditions of the work. In the absence of the Kamia his wife and children have to carry out his duties, and more often they are so fatigued and exhausted by hard and overtime work that they fall ill and suffer from serious bodily injury.

The question of fixing hours of work for the agricultural labourer in India has often been raised, but no serious attempts have been made to give it a practical shape. In Europe, where arable farming is associated with stock-raising and there is distribution of employment over the whole year for a permanent staff, it has been practicable to limit hours of employment. In countries like England and Germany, which have developed industrialized farming, hours of work can be fixed with ease on account of the somewhat permanent nature of employment. But so uniform a distribution of employment is unknown to Indian farming where hours of labour are unequally divided among different seasons, and where both in the sowing and the harvesting seasons the labourers must work long hours on account of the nature of their work and the special difficulties of Indian agriculture.

It cannot be denied that in India casual labourers have to work for very long hours and under very trying conditions because they are neither protected by legislation nor by organized bodies such as the English Agricultural Labourers' Union, or the Polish and Swedish Collective Agreements Societies, which have met with striking success in securing better terms for their members. But the statutory regulation of hours of labour would seem to depend purely on the question whether a capitalized system of agriculture has given rise to a class of land workers who have succeeded in attaining some degree of organization among themselves.<sup>9</sup> The Report on the Adaptation to Agricultural Labour of the Washington Decisions concerning the Regulation of Hours of Work shows that, in the light of the replies of respective Governments, it is difficult to adopt a Draft International Convention regulating the hours of work in agriculture.

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<sup>9</sup>Radhakamal Mukerjee: op. cit., p. 274.

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It recommends, however, that measures should be taken to encourage agricultural organizations to determine by collective agreements between employers and employees in agriculture, the maximum number of hours to be worked per annum, and the limits within which the daily average of hours may vary during the year, regard being had to peculiar circumstances and conditions obtaining in its industry.<sup>10</sup> There are no doubt insurmountable difficulties in the way of enforcing a uniform International Regulation in this direction, but judicious and methodically planned and elastic legislation could be drawn up, adapted to the peculiar agricultural conditions of a country and the needs of each category of agricultural labourers. Several countries like Germany, Czechoslovakia, Italy and Spain, have already passed regulations concerning the hours of labour in agriculture on the basis of National Legislation; and considering the gravity of the agrarian situation in India—where labour is disorganized and weak, the exodus from the country to the town is creating much mischief and unrest in urban areas, and agricultural unemployment is constantly increasing—a national policy in this direction is not only opportune but imperative.

Therefore an effective scheme of National Labour Legislation for the regulation of hours of work on the field should be based on the peculiar conditions of agriculture and the needs and circumstances of the country:

(a) The Eight-Hour-Day is becoming common in all industrial establishments. It will be better to extend the application of these laws for the employment of agricultural workers. Since the conditions of work are not so irksome as in the factories, a Ten-Hour-day will not be unreasonable. The usual working time in the Collective Agreements is limited in Sweden to 10 hours a day, and the maximum total to about 2,700 hours per annum; in Germany to a maximum of 2,900 hours per annum; and in Czechoslovakia to 2,618, with provision for longer hours, not exceeding 3,000 per annum, for persons occupied with the care and feeding of cattle.<sup>11</sup> In India, however, it is difficult to fix the number of hours by week or by month on account of the temporary nature of employment. For different parts of India, a daily maximum of 10 hours, not counting the interval for meals, and an yearly total of 3,622 hours may with advantage be laid down.

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<sup>10</sup>Report II on the Adaptation to Agricultural labour of the Washington Decisions concerning the regulation of hours of work—chapter III, p. 75.

<sup>11</sup>International Labour Conference, Third Session, 1921, Report II, pp. 29-44.

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(b) It should apply to all agricultural businesses which employ hired help, and to all classes of wage-earning labourers, casual or permanent, whether doing piece-work or employed by day.

(c) Work should not be done at a stretch. One hour's leisure in the afternoon is necessary during the winter and the rainy season, but at least four hours' rest (say from 11 A.M. to 3 P.M.) must be allowed during the summer, i.e. from the middle of April to June.

(d) It is necessary to fix the minimum duration of work during the winter and the maximum duration during the summer. In Austria the Farm and Forest Workers' Association lays down that agricultural workers shall work 8 hours a day during the three winter months and ten hours a day during the rest of the year, while during the three harvest months the hours per day are increased to 11 with extra pay for the additional hour.<sup>12</sup> In Poland, Collective Agreements have fixed the hours of work in agriculture as follows:—A daily maximum of 11½ hours for the months of June and July; a daily minimum of 6½ hours for the months of December and January; an annual average of nine hours and 20 minutes per day.<sup>13</sup> In Northern India also a seasonal adjustment to hours of labour will be necessary somewhat on the following lines:—

Season	No. of days	Time of work	Duration (hours)	Total No. of hours per season.
		A.M. P.M.		
Summer	91	5-11, 3-7	10	910
Monsoon	123	6-12, 1-6	11	1353
Winter	151	7-12, 1-5	9	1359

This gives a total of 3,622 hours per year and an average number of about 10 hours per day. This will vary, although slightly, with the technical and local exigencies, but the yearly maximum should under no circumstance be exceeded.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>12</sup> and <sup>13</sup> International Labour Conference Report II, Capt. I, Q. (B), pp. 29-35.

<sup>14</sup>NOTE: (a) In view of the poverty of the masses, no free Sundays (i.e. Six-Day-Weeks) are recommended.

(b) This maximum shall include—feeding cattle, grooming, cleaning of tools, cleaning of sheds, milking or tending of stock, slight repairs, stocking grain, or domestic work.

(c) This will exclude—"Walking-Time", required to cover the distance from their homes to the farms and back again.

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(e) Overtime work should not be allowed to finish the task ; instead, a fresh contingent should be employed. This will not only avoid the question of fatigue and consequent inefficiency, but minimize the problem of unemployment in rural areas.

(f) Night work should never be allowed in the case of women and children. Only in emergent cases adult male labour should be allowed to work on the following conditions:—(1) That during the summer, by reason of the heat, when the day work is much more trying than night work, the worker should be given the choice of work at night, to complete the day's unfinished work, provided the ten-hour limit is not exceeded. (2) That adequate protection is given against possibilities of overtime work, and ample facilities provided for work in dark and rainy nights.<sup>15</sup>

(g) Measures to control the application of agricultural labour protection should proceed by legislative enactment. Regulation of hours should be left to the Rural Labour Inspector or the Panchayats. In Spain, Local Commissions for Social Reform (*Juntas*) are charged with the application of laws of an agrarian nature. In Sweden the activity of Inspectors of Factories extends to agriculture, while in Finland and the Netherlands, Communal Labour Inspectors and Local Bodies exercise an effective control. All employers should maintain a Workers' Register, showing the terms of employment and conditions and nature of work. The violation of Labour Employment Laws should be severely punished, either by heavy fines, or withdrawal of permission to employ hired help.

*Conditions of Work:* Sweating is not a peculiar disability of the industrial worker. With its triple evil of long hours of work, insanitary conditions and low wages, it is commonly prevalent in agriculture. It is a common sight to watch the agricultural labourers working in dirty mud and water during the rainy season, or in the scorching heat of May and June, digging the ground and thatching houses, or working on the fields in the early hours of winter when they are exposed to very strong, cold winds. During the months of July, August and September, when the rainy season sets in and brings the epidemics of Cholera and Malaria, it is these people who pay the heaviest toll. Children and women working under similar unhealthy

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<sup>15</sup>In some countries "Nights" are hours between 10 P. M.—5 A. M. (Austria), 9 P. M.—4 A. M. (Finland and Poland), 10 P. M.—5 A. M. (Sweden). Since the length of night varies with seasons and latitudes, it is impossible to fix upon a definition by hours, and we shall apply the current and accepted interpretation of the term "Night" in India, which is the period from Sunset to Sunrise.

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conditions considerably increase the mortality rates or wreck their health and physique if once they suffer from these diseases. Most of these labourers suffer from itches, ring worm, and other skin diseases. During the summer, sunstroke is not uncommon, while exposure to cold during the winter, specially in the case of children, is a sure herald of quick death.<sup>16</sup> Illness in whatever form, whether due to overwork or unhealthy conditions of work, is both pathetic and tragic in the case of field workers and their families. It is pathetic because even one day's absence from work leads them to starvation; and tragic, because absence of medical aid, and the means of procuring it, most often result in untimely death. Therefore, not only should working conditions be made healthy, but adequate protection should be given by insurance against illness, accident and unemployment, which will apparently benefit most of these agricultural workers.

It has also been found that fatigue due to over-work and night-work often causes nervous breakdown in the absence of adequate rest and wholesome food. Restrictive regulations in the direction of securing a minimum number of hours of consecutive rest, rather than that of fixing a definite night period within which work should be prohibited, should therefore be sought. In Spain and Sweden agricultural work is performed from choice during cool nights rather than in the heat of day. This is also done to avoid deterioration of crops at harvest time. In India, night work during the summer, specially on moonlit nights, is recommended to avoid the trying weather of the day, provided a compensatory rest period during the day is effectively secured. (a) Only male adult workers should work during the rainy season when liability to disease is high and conditions of work difficult. (b) Women and children should be prohibited from heavy work done under unhealthy conditions. (c) Out-door work during May and June should be prohibited. (d) Women with four months' or more pregnancy should stop all manual labour. (e) In the event of illness or accident due to the nature of work, the employer should pay at least one-third of the wages during the period of disability. (f) A periodical physical fitness examination should be held by a qualified doctor employed by the Rural Development Department, or the Rural Labour Commissioner, and the weaklings and physically unfit should be withheld from employment in hard labour. (g) The nature and amount of work, and the conditions under which it is performed, should be under the special vigilance of the Labour Officer.

*A Minimum Wage Law:* The claim for a living wage, whether in industry or agriculture, is based in a large measure on the principles

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<sup>16</sup>Lorenzo: op. cit. p. 55.



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of social justice. It emphasizes the rights and welfare of the individual from the view-point of society. The estimate of the living wage has to be calculated by social judgment, and therefore, the labourer ought to have the means of living comfortably and decently.<sup>17</sup> Antoine held that, "not only there ought to be an objective equivalence between the labour performed and the wage received, but the labourer has a claim to Family Living Wage from considerations of social welfare."<sup>18</sup> At present the opinion is unanimous among rural sociologists that the agricultural worker should get a decent livelihood. This implies not only the objective but also the subjective needs which play an important part in modern life on account of the fast-changing habits and customs. "A decent livelihood, or a Living Wage, must conform in a reasonable degree to the conventional standard of life that prevails in any community or group."<sup>19</sup> Devas suggested that, "all workers should be guaranteed the means of physical existence; practical possibility of marriage; separate homes; insurance against sickness, and old age; and some access to the treasures of literature, art and culture."<sup>20</sup> Gompers defined a Living Wage as "a wage which, when expended in the most economical manner, shall be sufficient to maintain an average-sized family in a manner consistent with whatever the contemporary local civilization recognises as indispensable to physical and mental health, or as required by the rational self-respect of human beings."<sup>21</sup> Thus we see that the Living Wage, the basis of the Minimum Wage, does not simply consider the labourer's industrial efficiency, but also his social obligations towards his family, his community and the state. In the Soviet Union the worker is paid wages in accordance with the amount and quality of his individual labour, but in addition there exist a number of other forms of distribution of wealth, in which the collective nature of labour comes to the forefront. These include Workers' Welfare Funds, Social Insurance, Funds for Technical Training, the construction of houses, public services, and other socialized forms of wages.<sup>22</sup> The enforcement by the State of a national minimum of wages in order to maintain society in a state of economic and social efficiency is, therefore, advocated.

The wages paid to workers in agriculture are too low to maintain them in a state of efficiency and to enable them to reproduce and

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<sup>17</sup>John A. Ryan: "A Living Wage", p. 63.

<sup>18</sup>"Cours d' economie Sociale", p. 601, quoted by Ryan, op. cit., p. 53.

<sup>19</sup>Ryan, op. cit., p. 94.

<sup>20</sup>'Political Economy', p. 498.

<sup>21</sup>(Quoted) Ryan: op. cit., p. 98.

<sup>22</sup>Kraval: op. cit., pp. 400-404.

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rear a sufficient number of offspring to take their place. Hence, as a matter of simple protection to the national life, both present and future, all agricultural workers should be given, through appropriate legal measures, a remuneration sufficient not only to replace and maintain but also to develop their productive power. But serious difficulties may arise in the calculation of a Standard Living Wage and its application to different parts of the country. Therefore precautions like the following are necessary for the successful operation of the Minimum Wage Law :—

(a) "The Social Estimate", or average estimate, may be vitiated by long established custom or public opinion, and make the requisites of Living Wage too general or too difficult of ascertainment. Therefore a representative rural body (preferably the Panchayat) should be entrusted with this task.

(b) "A decent and reasonable life", in India, implies married and family life for normal living, because family life is enforced upon the labourer, which is not commonly the case in the West. Therefore, the minimum of the material conditions of decent and reasonable living comprises, for the adult labourer, the means of supporting a family.

(c) The labourer's remuneration should not vary with the size of his family, because the size of family in India varies not only with occupations but also with caste-groups. Moreover, some lower castes practise bigamy and even polygyny, while others have to maintain a large number of non-working dependants. Hence the 'average size' and not the 'usual size' of the family should be considered in calculating the minimum wage, which is two adults and three non-working dependants, i.e.  $3\frac{1}{2}$  adults.\*

(d) A Family Living Wage should also be given to the unmarried and to those who are least efficient workers, because this will promote social utility, which may not only raise the general standard of living but also make them productive and efficient.

(e) 'Wages are paid in goods', which may complicate calculation. It should be noted that all 'real-wages' will be commuted into cash, and it should be at the choice of the worker to accept an equivalent of his money wage, or a part of it, in goods.

Therefore, a Living Wage, for the Central Gangetic Plains, should be calculated as follows:—

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\*Note: The average size of family in India is 4.3 and the number of children surviving is 2.9 (or 70 per cent.) of the 4 born alive. Hence the average size comes to two adults and about three non-working dependants =  $3\frac{1}{2}$  adults.

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1. Food for the labourer, wife and three dependants. (Of this 25% should be energizing food) .....	Rs. 126
2. Clothing, for summer and winter (including bedding for the winter and shoes for the rainy season) .....	32
3. Upkeep of a house with two rooms and one verandah ..	14
4. Provision against unemployment, sickness, old age, etc. ..	12
5. Education of children .....	12
6. Recreation and socio-religious obligations .....	16
7. Emergencies and Miscellaneous .....	4
	216

The Minimum Wage Law should apply also to woman and child labour in agriculture. Those women who are forced to provide their own sustenance have a right to what is a living wage for them. Since they have no other means of living than their own labour, the compensation therefore should be sufficient to enable them to live decently. Again, women doing the same work with the same degree of efficiency as men, in occupations where both sexes are employed, have a right to the same remuneration as their male fellow-workers. The Soviet Union does not maintain the system of unequal pay for men and women performing similar work.<sup>23</sup> "Distributive justice requires that equally competent workers be rewarded equally."<sup>24</sup> Fiarbanks held that, "unless we hold that an increase in the proportion of women workers is undesirable, we must admit that social welfare would be advanced by the payment of uniform wages to both sexes for equally efficient labour."<sup>25</sup> Children of either sex, who have reached the age of work, but who cannot perform the work of adults, have a right to a decent livelihood, because their wages constitute their sole source of maintenance. "A Living Wage for children refers to their essential needs as members of a family."<sup>26</sup> In the Soviet Union all employed youths over sixteen receive the same wage as adults performing the same work in agriculture, while young workers are trained without any cost to themselves and receive pay while learning. This is a unique achievement of the U.S.S.R. where children are trained and their productive powers developed instead of being exploited and exhausted as in the capitalist countries.<sup>27</sup> It should also be noted that in India women and children are not employed on a permanent basis during the whole of the working year.

<sup>23</sup>Kraval: "Labour in Soviet Planning", op. cit., p. 422.

<sup>24</sup>Ryan: "A Living Wage", p. 76.

<sup>25</sup>"Introduction to Sociology", p. 148.

<sup>26</sup>Ryan, *ibid*, p. 77.

<sup>27</sup>Kraval: *ibid*, p. 429.

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Women are obliged to devote their attention to household duties while the children may attend the school. Therefore, in their case a minimum wage per hour (one anna for women and six pies for child-workers) is recommended. This system would be beneficial both to the employers and employees: the former will economize time and money, while the latter will be able to look after their household duties and education.

The Labour Organizations at Bombay and Ahmedabad reckon that Rs. 44 per month should be regarded as reasonable minimum for the maintenance of an industrial worker, his wife and two children in decent comfort. This estimate is high not only for big cities like Bombay and Ahmedabad but far in excess of the average income of an unskilled worker in other industrial centres. There is but slight possibility of securing Rs. 44 a month for factory workers, when, in many places the income of a family working on the land barely amounts to that for a whole year.<sup>27a</sup> The minimum demand of the Socialist section of the Mazdoor Sabha at Cawnpore is Rs. 30 per month for ordinary mill workers. Our calculations show that in the case of agricultural workers nothing less than Rs. 216 per annum can be held to deserve the name of a living wage. Therefore, a law should be enacted fixing the minimum limit at Rs. 216 and compelling all employers to pay a living wage. The Provincial Governments should appoint Enquiry Committees consisting of the representatives of Peasant and Agricultural Workers' Unions to report upon the grievances, sufferings and needs of agricultural workers, and to suggest ways and means for improving their social and economic condition and to take early steps to implement such recommendations. It is further desired to establish Agricultural Wages Boards and extend to agricultural workers the Payment of Wages Act and the Workmen's Compensation Act.

*Protection of Women Labourers* : The fact that more than 30 million women are employed as agricultural workers and labourers-unspecified in India calls for immediate legislation to safeguard their interests. Any measure of protection should apply only to regular wage-earners in agriculture, and no difference should be made between agricultural undertakings employing only a few women separately, and those employing female labour in groups. The International Labour Conference recommends that, "measures should be taken to ensure to women wage-earners employed in agricultural undertakings protection before and after child-birth similar to that provided by the International Draft Convention adopted by the International Labour Conference at Washington for women employed in

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<sup>27a</sup>Harold Butler: *Problems of Industry in the East*, 1928, p. 31.

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Industry and Commerce, and that such measures should include the right to a period of absence from work before and after child-birth, and to a grant of benefit during the said periods, provided either out of public funds or by means of a system of insurance."<sup>28</sup> Some countries like Finland, Great Britain, and Switzerland, have already got general sickness insurance schemes which include Maternity Insurance. A series of laws has established measures for the protection of women workers in agriculture in Soviet Russia and granted them special privileged conditions. This has greatly improved their cultural level and living conditions. During pregnancy and child-birth, women are allowed time off with full pay for a period of 8 weeks before and 8 weeks after child-birth. The U. S. S. R. spends huge amounts on Socialized Restaurants, Children's Nurseries, Sanatoria, Kindergartens and Hygiene Institutes, which relieve women of a large part of their domestic burdens.<sup>29</sup>

In India, owing to the breaking up of the rigidity of customs and traditions, the employment of women labourers in all forms of agricultural operations, and the employment almost entirely of married women, the need for the prohibition of the employment of women before and after child-birth appears to arise imperatively. The circumstances not only of many employed women but also women independent of an employer, call in quite as urgent a manner as those of employed women for protection in child-birth. Motherhood in India means not only a danger to life, but an unconditional loss in wages. The Draft Convention lays down six weeks' leave before and after child-birth, but in view of the difference in the working conditions and physical strength of women employed in agriculture than those of women employed in industries, the Governments of Finland and Poland suggested that the period of abstention from work should be four weeks before and after child-birth.

In India, however, the protective measures adopted should be extended to : women workers employed permanently on a farm ; women workers who are not members of the farmer's family ; women workers employed individually or in groups, casual unspecified labourers, dairy-maids, and domestic servants :—

(a) In view of the poverty of the masses work should be stopped two months before and for one month after child-birth. •

(b) Provision should be made concerning an allowance of half an hour twice a day, in addition to meal time, for the purpose of nursing the baby, for the second and third month after the child-birth.

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<sup>28</sup>International Labour Conference, Third Sessions, Geneva, Oct., 1921, Report III (B), Part I, p. 28.

<sup>29</sup>Kraval: op. cit., pp. 420-23.

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(c) The extension of Child Welfare and Maternity Centres and recruitment of Health Visitors to work in conjunction with the rural Labour Inspector or the Village Panchayat is also necessary. It is yet too early to advocate the system of Maternity Insurance on the lines of the National Health Insurance Acts and the Maternity and Child Welfare Act of 1918, of Great Britain, or the Compulsory Sickness Insurance Bill of Italy, on account of the poverty of people, paucity of funds, and the absence of education, public opinion, and labour organizations.

(d) It is difficult in India for the employers to pay wages to an absent worker, therefore, at least in the case of independent workers, this maintenance should be provided by public bodies or the Kisan Sabhas through a system of insurance; or by the State through the maternity welfare department.

(e) State aid is necessary to provide to independent workers funds during maternity period as well as free attendance by a qualified doctor or certified midwife. It is strongly recommended that a scheme of general benefit like that of Soviet Russia should be introduced in India to relieve women agricultural workers of a part of their domestic duties.

*Protection of Child Workers in Agriculture:* The employment of children in agriculture as compared with other branches of industry offers a field for investigation distinctly unique. It is frequently claimed that such employment is not open to criticism as it affords a wholesome physical and moral training, that there is no temptation for night work, that the work is done in fresh air, and there are less hazards than in industrial occupations. Moreover, the majority of children engaged in agriculture are working either for their parents or with them, and parental influence and protection are usually present. But, while in agriculture there has been no Government intervention as evidenced in factory legislation, still the standards of judgment as to wages, legitimate hours and working conditions, vary so widely between different employers and in different parts of India, that abuses are of constant occurrence, and therefore the problem claims serious consideration.

The administration of a child labour legislation which will regulate the employment of children in agriculture presents serious difficulties. In factories it is made possible by the organization and extension of a Factory Inspection Department. But conditions of employment in agriculture, where employees may frequently work on widely separated fields under the same employer, make detection and enforcement difficult. Inspection over vast areas becomes costly and inefficient. The natural result is that direct legislation regarding agricultural

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employment of children is ineffective, and therefore, for the most part, reliance has to be placed on the indirect application of other laws as have been introduced in the U. S. A., Canada and European countries.

Indirect measures for protection of child labour in agricultural pursuits are adopted by many countries in the form of compulsory school attendance laws which present relatively few administrative difficulties. For the period during which children are by law required, to attend school, their continuous employment in agriculture, or any other class of work, with its consequent evils is immediately prevented and the relative cheapness and simplicity of administration of such laws in proportion to their undertaking has had considerable success in European countries.

In the U. S. A., in 27 out of 48 states, the employment of children during school hours, in any gainful occupation, is definitely forbidden. This applies to children under 16 years for 8 months in the year unless they have completed the eighth grade of the elementary school. In Canada the "Adolescent School Attendance Act" fixes the minimum age of employment in agriculture as between 14 and 16 years. But in both these countries advantageous protection is given primarily to urban than rural children, and direct regulation of hours of children's work in agriculture has received little attention.<sup>30</sup>

Modified Laws for child labour in agriculture, however, are to be found in various European countries. The Czechoslovakia Act of 1919 prohibits the general employment of children under 12 years of age, but employment in "light work in agriculture" is permitted from the age of 10. In Denmark school attendance is compulsory up to the age of 14, and boys are prohibited from work in occupations subject to inspection, but the child in agriculture is permitted to work with machinery, and without the safeguard of inspection, from the age of 10. The Amended Employment of Children Act (1918) of Great Britain and Ireland prohibits the employment of children in agriculture below 10 years of age, during school hours, or before 6 A.M. and after 8 P.M. The Roumanian Government prohibits employment of children in agriculture during the period of compulsory education, viz., up to 14 years. In Austria the Act of December 1918 ("Staatsgesetzblatt" XX, Para 7) provides that, "no child shall be employed under the age of 12 years. However, in agriculture and domestic work, children may be employed on light work as soon as they are ten years of age." These enactments, as will be noticed, are far too inadequate to afford sufficient protection to children in agricul-

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<sup>30</sup>"Systematic Source Book in Rural Sociology", Sorokin, Zimmerman and Galpin, Book III, pp. 188-274.

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ture, because these countries being primarily industrial, the problem of rural child labour is not so acute there as that of their employment in urban factories and workshops. However, this problem is receiving serious attention in all the agricultural countries of Europe.<sup>31</sup>

In India, however, no such measures have yet been taken. The compulsory attendance and age limit for schooling have failed deplorably as shown by the Hartog Committee Report (1929) and the Weir Report of 1934. Responsibility for the enforcement of school attendance laws is generally centered in the local school boards of the district, with little or no emphasis placed upon the co-operation of the police. In some European countries Attendance Officers are vested with police powers so far as these are necessary for the execution of their duties, a policy much resented in India. Penalties for the non-enforcement of Compulsory School Attendance Laws upon local officers have either been inadequate or entirely absent, constituting a serious impediment in achieving the desired end.

These measures of protection are intended not only to facilitate the physical development of children, but also to enable them to carry out their educational requirements. Therefore, the necessary provisions for an effective working of indirect legislation should be sought along the following lines:—

(a) Indirect co-operation of Educational Laws for a certain period of attendance.

(b) Laws for fixed ages below which a child's admission to general employment can be controlled. The International Labour Conference, 1921, recommended that the employment of children under the age of 14 for private agricultural undertakings should be prohibited during the hours of compulsory school attendance. Primary Education in India finishes at ten years, which should be the age limit for India.

(c) Prohibition for child employment during the school hours. The Washington Draft Convention laid down that there should be no prohibition of work before and after school hours, and the U. P. Economic Planning Committee recommends that, the rural schools should temporarily be closed down during the sowing and harvesting seasons,<sup>32</sup> because there is a shortage of labour and work cannot be delayed, poor families have to depend on the earnings of their children

<sup>31</sup>Report on the Adaptation to Agricultural Labour of the Washington Decisions concerning the Protection of Women and Children, Report IIIB, Part III, p. 49.

<sup>32</sup>Report on Economic Planning in the United Provinces, 1937.



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also, and the busy seasons give an opportunity to these children to earn something for the year. It may, however, be remarked that the closing down of schools will serve no useful purpose, though boys of working age should be allowed to absent themselves for a definite period, not exceeding a month. "Examination of existing Education Laws in various countries shows, however, that in many cases exemption from school attendance is very frequently allowed on a liberal scale for purposes of agricultural work. Certain Governments have found it possible to arrange school-hours and school-holidays in such a way as to allow children to work in the fields at the times when their assistance is most needed and at the same time to protect them from abuses"—(Netherlands and Switzerland).<sup>33</sup> An effective method of ensuring the working of this system would be to fix a minimum period, say, 8 months in the year, below which the school instruction should not be reduced, and this would certainly represent a substantial measure of progress in India.

(d) Prohibition for employment in dangerous tasks involving the operation of complex machinery, requiring hard manual labour, and other tasks injurious or liable to prove injurious to children's health.

(e) Abstention from work on certain days or weeks in certain seasons of the year, e.g. free Sundays, and no work in the months of May and June.

(f) The co-operation of the Panchayat and the local police is necessary for the enforcement of these laws. Work done on the fields will be a part of technical training for the boys and will be approved and supervised by Rural Labour Inspectors, sub-Deputy Inspectors of Schools, or any other Officers specially deputed for this work.

However elaborate, indirect legislation can hardly be effective without positive legislative measures. Provisions have to be made to handle a care-free population such as we find in rural India. Therefore, the first step in this direction should be to strengthen the Educational Laws in regard to Compulsory Primary Education in rural areas. At the present, the chief cause of wastage and stagnation in elementary stages lies in the weakness, timidity and irresponsibility of the Local Boards. Without a strong hand Educational Laws will remain sterile, and without emphatic Educational Laws, Child Labour Legislation would prove futile. The Whitley Commission has touched the problem of child labour in urban industries and workshops, but the Agricultural Commission had made no provision for the protection of

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<sup>33</sup>I. L. C. Report III (B), pp. 72-73.

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children in agriculture. It now rests with the respective Provincial Governments to pass such legislative measures as would provide sufficient protection to tender ages, which, if neglected, would deteriorate the national fund of agricultural labour. Specific legislation would not only save children from the atrocities of immature employment, but would facilitate the working of Educational Laws in regard to compulsory attendance, as no child unfit for employment in agriculture would sit idle at home, but would attend a rural school and receive the necessary training in basic education.

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## CHAPTER XIV.

### LABOUR LEGISLATION AND SOCIAL REFORM

*The Surplus Labour Problem in India:* Agricultural unemployment is one of the symptoms of an unhealthy agrarian situation. The necessity for taking measures against unemployment in agriculture is not universally felt, but in the case of India such measures are the indispensable complement of the general measures for the amelioration of the agricultural workers' lot. Many western countries like Finland, Norway and Austria, suffer from a serious shortage of labour, but in India there is always a large number of unemployed agricultural workers which swells considerably in seasons of inactivity. Agricultural unemployment occurs in various forms, which must not be confused, since for each there are different remedies: (a) Unemployment resulting from crisis in agricultural industry, (b) Seasonal unemployment, which is inherent in the very nature of agricultural work, (c) Unemployment, due to lack of technical skill or the inferiority of the agricultural workers' position compared to that of the industrial workers, (d) Under-employment, resulting from the cultivation of, and the complete dependence upon, under-sized holdings. In India, seasonal unemployment due to the period of enforced inactivity, and a chronic state of under-employment due to the mal-distribution of holdings and defective Tenancy Laws, have reached an alarming stage, and demand a concerted system of regulation.

Relief for surplus labour is found in emigration. Emigration to the forests, industrial or mining centres of the country would give them a greater staying power and offer an expanding field of domestic service and miscellaneous employment. The development of transport facilities, and the linking up of remote rural areas with industrial centres will considerably facilitate the distribution of labour power during the periods of seasonal unemployment. In Belgium the established custom is that the peasant family deposes one of its members in an annual rotation to undertake either industrial labour in the city or field work on another peasant's farm. Transfer of agricultural labour power between distant places of work is common in the Netherlands, while Workmen's trains and bicycles are used commonly in Denmark and Norway. In Finland during the winter, when agricultural work decreases, the unemployed agricultural workers migrate to forest regions on account of the excellent transport facilities provided by the State. In India the absence of such facilities, as are afforded in

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foreign countries, results in the stagnation of surplus labour power, and the hired hand has to stay at home with the small comfort of a single meal, thin gruel and loin cloth in a prosperous year and starvation in a year of scarcity.<sup>1</sup>

Among the measures suggested to minimize the effects of an unemployment crisis, may particularly be mentioned the organization of temporary work to maintain those thrown out of work until the crisis passes. In Finland relief works are established in the vast State forests and the marshy grounds and the Public Works Programmes are completed only at such times. The French, Swiss and Italian Governments encourage home-work in the country and have developed important cottage industries by the aid of seasonal agricultural labourers.<sup>2</sup> There is a great scope in India to utilize the surplus labour power for the extension of afforestation in arid regions, construction of roads specially in rural areas, extension of the scheme of canal construction, and expansion of cottage industries.

It is further disposed to establish regular public and state unemployment agencies in the over-populated areas, and to create Agricultural Labour Exchanges with a view to facilitating the emigration of workers from areas oversupplied with workers to those under-supplied. They will not simply transfer labour power from one agricultural region to another, but will maintain a seasonal balance of labour supply in agriculture and industry. The Employment Service of Canada and the Agricultural Labour Exchanges of Austria have successfully combated rural exodus and maintained a seasonal balance of labour supply in forestry and agriculture. Such Labour Exchanges and Unemployment Agencies in India shall render free service for persons in search of employment, and shall be controlled and managed by a special committee selected from the Village Panchayat, and remain under the direct supervision of the Rural Labour Inspectors. Village Labour Exchanges shall function under the District and Provincial Employment Exchanges. The Provincial Exchange shall be controlled by the Rural Labour Commissioner.

The enforced idleness and chronic under-employment of labour power is due to uneconomic holdings. The burden of a disproportionate amount of semi-idle labour not only lowers the efficiency of agriculture but reduces the workers to the verge of starvation. It may now be necessary to check the repeated partition and scattered distribution of holdings by modifying the Laws of Inheritance. In Europe

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<sup>1</sup>Mukerjee, op. cit., p. 247.

<sup>2</sup>International Labour Conference, Third Session, Geneva, 1921, Report IIIA, pp. 38, 58-59.

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and Russia Anti-Partition Legislation has been tremendously successful. In Prussia, the Reich Law of 1920 lays down rules which should govern the formation of family-holdings by grants of the Federal Government. In Denmark the law of 1906 forbids the reduction of the area of a peasant farm below a certain taxable value which is roughly estimated as from 25-125 acres. The Russian Agrarian Code of 1922 allows division of land among the family only when new farms are established for the benefit of members who are withdrawing. But such divisions as would impair their efficiency are prohibited.<sup>3</sup>

In India attempts have been made to readjust small holdings by voluntary exchanges through the Co-operative Societies but have met with little success. The Baroda Act of 1920 for the consolidation of holdings has now become a dead letter. An exchange or consolidation of holdings is impossible under the existing Tenancy Laws, since in the U. P. the Occupancy Tenants cannot be bought out. Panchayats are not strong enough to be entrusted with the task, and the Co-operative Department has failed to do much in this direction. In the absence of compulsion one or two cultivators have held up indefinitely the consolidation of holdings of a village. Therefore only drastic changes in the Laws of Inheritance, Tenancy Laws and Land Policies can do some good. As a tentative measure legislation should be introduced along the following lines:—

- (a) Cultivators cultivating one-third of the cultivated area of the village should be given the power to apply for the consolidation of the village. In Prussia and Japan the scheme is forced on the rest on the basis of a bare majority, while in Austria and Switzerland this is done, if approved, by two-thirds of the cultivators representing more than half the land.
- (b) In the beginning consolidation should be made only of whole villages. In the case of scattered *mahals*, consolidation only of the holdings of the *mahal* would be possible provided the tenants do not cultivate holdings in other *mahals*.
- (c) The reconstituted holding should be an economic holding, not less than three acres of land of average fertility. It should be held by the preferred heir of the family as family property, or he should compensate the other heirs. An economic holding should be considered impartible and exempt from seizure for debt.

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<sup>3</sup>Gayster: "Planning and Development of Agriculture in the Soviet Union", paper read at the World Social Economic Planning Conference, Hague, 1931, pp. 379-398.

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- (d) Consolidation is a highly technical matter and requires a trained staff if it is to be done on a large scale. A consolidation officer should be appointed to a district, or the powers of a consolidation officer should be given to an Assistant Collector, who will receive applications from cultivators and proceed with consolidation if he finds that the request is *bona fide* and unobjectionable.
- (e) Some limit must be laid down to the cost of consolidation per acre, Government bearing the excess cost if any; and no application for consolidation should be entertained when a village is under partition or *vice versa*.

Any scheme of consolidation and redistribution of holdings should accompany the complete reorganization of agriculture and the development of large scale industries and cottage workshops. This will facilitate the shifting of surplus population, set free as a result of reconstitution of holdings, from agriculture to industrial and mining centres, and maintain an equilibrium between the rural and urban population.

*Relief by Moratorium:* Moratorium is a device to protect the agricultural classes from the consequences of default by the postponement of payment decreed by the state through the medium of courts or legislation. Various countries and governments of the world resorted to moratory legislation only in times of acute crisis such as periods of war, great economic upheavals, accentuated financial stress resulting from failures of reputed interests and international banking concerns. In the U. P. and Madras the Congress Governments passed Moratorium Bills to afford temporary relief to the cultivators who had not been able to recover from the recent agricultural crisis and were greatly hit by the failure of crops due to bad monsoons. Such relief was given indiscriminately in the form of general moratoria, which is neither just nor fair. *First*, because there is always a good number of reckless debtors who knowing that their assets will not meet half their debts, defy the creditors, and whose assets and earning capacity cannot possibly serve to clear off even their conciliated debts. *Secondly*, under the definition of "agriculturists", who are eligible for such preference in the Bill are included even the rent receivers of inferior degree. *Thirdly*, the measure of relief is not proportionate to the need of the agriculturists. The cultivators in some parts of these provinces have better agronomic facilities than their unfortunate brethren in less favoured tracts which are subject to periodical droughts and famines. In the debt legislation in Bengal, tenants who have lost their land through indebtedness and are working as farm hands can apply for relief to

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the Debt Conciliation Boards. If, however, they do not undertake work in the field they are not eligible for relief.

It has been argued that moratory legislation is unnecessary when almost all the provinces of India are over-flowing with Protective Legislation. The Usurious Loans Act gives considerable relief to oppressed debtors. The Debtors' Protection Act, the Agriculturist Loans Act, and the Debt Conciliation Act, are all ameliorative measures. Moreover, the Land Mortgage Banks can afford relief to deserving debtors. The laws, as they stand at present, if worked with vigour and enthusiasm, will amply solve the problems of poverty and debt-bondage. But judicial moratorium becomes necessary for speedy actions during a crisis, and a complex economic system carrying a huge load of debt might well collapse under a sudden blow unless some such instrument were utilized for permitting a breathing space.

In order to make relief more effective a rightly conceived Moratorium Bill should provide laws and regulations regarding specific methods of relief to be afforded and the procedure regarding the administration of such relief by competent judicial authority. It should be drafted with the following considerations in view :—

(a) Relief should be granted only to those debtors who are not regular defaulters and whose assets and earning capacity is such as to give promise that they can clear off their debts in time.

(b) The provisions of the Bill should be adapted to meet the difficulties of the actual tillers of the soil.

(c) Discriminate relief should be granted to deserving and *bona fide* cases on the recommendation of the Panchayat and the District Officer. A relief to a man who finds it difficult to make both ends meet and falls into the clutches of unscrupulous money-lenders is a fit subject for relief by the state.

(d) Necessary precaution is called for to detect cases of swelling of the debts by fraudulent bonds and notes by the debtors, and concealment of movable properties during the moratory period. Otherwise, it is likely to cause considerable damage to the credit and morale of the Province.

(e) Moratorium should be decreed and administered through the medium of courts.

(f) The term of the moratorium should be reasonable, usually extending to the next harvest. But if such postponement of payment decreed by the State is passed for a long term, or made a regular scapegoat, it will bring about a crash of agricultural credit and result in economic ruin and disaster.

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(g) Moreover, the present laws affording relief to the cultivators should be worked more vigorously, and new Land and Tenancy Reforms should be enacted as a permanent feature of relief otherwise the Moratorium will be like administering chloroform to the patient and then searching for the surgical instruments.<sup>4</sup>

*Abolition of Praedial Dues and Services:* There is no denying the fact that absentee landlordism and the growth of sub-infeudation have intensified the exploitation of agricultural labourers. The condition is more pronounced in Bengal and Bihar, where the chain of sub-infeudation, due to the work of Tenancy Legislation, has gone to grotesque lengths. This practice is followed by zamindars as well as the inferior tenure-holders with the result that middlemen under middlemen have sprung up, who are eating away the meagre profit derived from small-scale farming, and are lowering the legal status and the economic position of the actual tillers of the soil. The practice of levying *abwabs* and illegal cesses in addition to the legal rent by the agents of private proprietors continues to prevail throughout the provinces of Northern India. Sections 76 and 77 of the Bengal Tenancy Act, the Chota Nagpur and Orissa Tenancy Act, and Santal Parganas Rent Regulation III of 1912, afford sufficient protection to the tenants, but the tenants are generally so poor that they acquiesce in the violation of their rights by the zamindars for fear of worse happening to them. The United Provinces Tenancy Bill has made sufficient provision for the abolition of all forms of praedial dues and services.<sup>5</sup> There is, therefore, an urgent need for a separate legislation to suppress this practice, and it should include the following provisions:

- (a) Immediate abolition of all forms of *Begar*.
- (b) Commutation of *Abwabs* and *Rukumats* into cash.
- (c) Keeping of a record of such exactions by Village Panchayats who should make enquiries and recommend punishment to the District Officers.
- (d) Amendment of Tenancy Acts so as to give power to the District Officer to deal summarily with cases of illegal levy.

*Anti-Kamiauti Legislation:* Agrestic serfdom is most commonly associated with conditions of socio-economic nature. These conditions are not peculiar to certain provinces of northern India, but are characteristic of all regions where the agricultural population has been dissociated from modern social and economic changes in the country.

<sup>4</sup>Subrahmanyam and Sundram: "The Moratorium Bill", The Indian Review, December, 1937.

<sup>5</sup>The U. P. Tenancy Bill, Proceedings of the U. P. Legislative Assembly, January, 1939.



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A systematic and detailed study of this time-honoured institution in India leads us to the following conclusions:—

(a) Agrestic serfdom is a common feature of those places where low castes and depressed orders are most numerous. The ethnic composition of the village greatly determines the social and economic status of the people, and is responsible for the survival of these conditions. Whether in the capacity of a slave, a serf, or a *begar*, at present more than fifty million people in India suffer both socially and economically on account of the stigma of untouchability attached to them. In Bihar and Orissa, about one-sixth of the total population (i.e.  $7\frac{1}{2}$  million) belongs to 24 purest aboriginal and 17 semi-aboriginal tribes. Besides these, more than  $6\frac{1}{2}$  million belong to the depressed classes. Thus one-third of the total population of Bihar and Orissa is composed of semi-serf, depressed and exterior castes. In Chota Nagpur this class accounts for 65-85 per cent. of the total population.<sup>6</sup> The Kamia population is composed of these aboriginal tribes and depressed castes which are lazy and careless and are content with a dole of food and a house to live in, and so long as these are not denied, they consider it an honour to relish the crumbs from their masters' tables.

(b) Serfdom is an evil of the zamindari system. In districts where there is landlord tenancy over big estates, and the zamindari is under the Brahmins, Thakurs, Rajputs, Pathans, and other high castes, the system has gathered enormous strength. Wherever the original population was subdued by foreign immigrants, who, though financially powerful, were unable to cultivate the land themselves on account of the natural conditions of soil and water supply, a regular supply of labour became imperative for the cultivation of the landlords' 'Sir' land, and to assist the agents of an absentee landlord.

(c) Serfdom is almost entirely associated with indebtedness. The mahajan has always exploited the miserable plight of the poor peasantry, and reduced them to eternal serfdom. Since the Kamia population is composed of migratory tribes, in whose hands neither the principal debt is secure nor a guarantee of regular labour supply obtainable, they have to be pinned to the estate and their wanderlust broken.

The existence of the Kamia system is both a social and an economic menace, and in these days of considerable freedom, widened economic outlook and social upheaval, and a strong Central Government, it tells on the whole social and administrative machinery of a

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<sup>6</sup>Census Report, Bihar and Orissa, Report I, Part I, 1931: (Appendix I, p. 279, and Appendix IV, p. 290).

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progressive country. Though social and legislative measures are being taken to eradicate these measles-spots from this country, yet a more vigorous and determined move is required to abolish an old custom that preys upon the very life of the man behind the plough.

Under British Rule slavery was abolished not at once, but only gradually. The existence of the institution of slavery in the latter half of the 18th century was brought to light by Jesuit Missionaries in Chota Nagpur. These missionaries took an active interest in the temporal interests of their converts, and lent a sympathetic ear to the complaints of the aborigines about the heavy load of praedial services and the cruelties and injustices to which they were subjected in the capacity of slaves. In 1774 legal measures were taken in the Bhagalpur District (Bihar), and in 1789 Lord Cornwallis despatched instructions to the Collector of Shahabad as to the manner in which he should determine cases of slavery.<sup>7</sup>

On the basis of the Minute of Sir Buchanan, more effective measures were taken in the Government of India Regulation X of 1881, prohibiting the importation of slaves from foreign countries into the British territories. This rule was, by Regulation III of 1832, extended to the Provinces which subsequently came into the possession of the British Government. Later on, Act V of 1843 prohibited all Government officers from recognizing slavery, and it was finally abolished in 1860 by the I. P. C. which declared the equality of all men and provided punishment for buying or selling any person as a slave.

In spite of these legal measures this evil custom continued to flourish in a modified form called Kamiauti (debt - bondage) in remote rural areas of northern India. In 1872 Hunter found that the system was a universal feature of the rural economy of Chota Nagpur. In 1908 Sifton observed its detrimental growth in Hazaribagh, and in 1913 Bridge submitted a report to the Government of Bihar and Orissa sounding the dangers of a growing menace to slavery in the province.<sup>8</sup> It was on these findings that the Government of Bihar and Orissa passed the "B. & O. Kamiauti Agreements Act VIII of 1920", which declared that such agreements were void, unless:—

- (a) the full terms of the agreement were expressed in a stamped document;

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<sup>7</sup>Encyclopaedia of Ethics and Religion, Chapter on Slavery.

<sup>8</sup>Rent Rate and Settlement Report, District Palamau.

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- (b) the Kamia was given a copy of this document ;
- (c) the period of the agreement exceeded or could possibly exceed one year;
- (d) the Kamia's liability was completely extinguished on the expiry of the term of the agreement;
- (e) the Kamia's remuneration under the agreement was fair and equitable.

But the Kamiauti Agreements Act of 1920 did not prove effective in suppressing the abuse. The master-landlords proved too elusive in getting round the legal restrictions. Moreover, the Act does not apply to agreements entered into by 'skilled workmen', so that the old kamiauti conditions may still apply to labour rendered by such persons as chamars. In 1932 Dr. Radhakamal Mukerjee personally found that 20 per cent. of the population of a village in Hazaribagh consisted of Kamia serfs who held no land.<sup>9</sup> Our investigations in several districts of Bihar, Orissa and Chota Nagpur have disclosed the fact that although the system has not been spreading, as before, it is still in existence.

All legal measures have so far proved ineffective completely to suppress this system of serfdom. So the matter rests at the present time. But no legislation can ever become fruitful unless the people, for whom it is formulated, consciously strive to make the best of it. In this particular case, legislation preceded the economic and social uplift of the serf population, a policy nothing short of putting the cart before the house. As a temporary measure, when such special legislation is enforced, the Government should provide new lands by reclamation for the discharged serfs in the same vicinity, or provide facilities for emigration to industrial districts. In the case of the extension of cultivation, the tenancy of land hitherto uncultivated should be offered to the Khunt-Kattidar, and not to the holder of adjoining cultivated land, as has been the practice in the past. Otherwise the landless labourers will have no chance of settling down as peasant proprietors.

Legislation, in order to be effective, should cover all the problems directly or indirectly associated with the system of serfdom. There is an urgent need for a new Anti-Kamiauti Act which should be based on the following considerations:—

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<sup>9</sup>op. cit., p. 232.

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- (a) Almost all forms of agrestic serfdom take their root in indebtedness. When the yoke of the money-lender becomes unbearably heavy, and indebtedness assumes a chronic form, the plight of the derelict farm-hand is nothing short of serfdom. Therefore, neither the principal debt, nor the interest accrued thereon, should be repayable in services.
- (b) No landlord should have more 'Sir' land than he can cultivate himself with family assistance. (The U. P. Government has now limited the "Sir" to 50 acres).
- (c) All praedial services (Begar) and Dues (Rukumats) should be commuted into cash.
- (d) There should be a strict regulation of the hours and conditions of work.
- (e) The employment of Kamias should be considered a penal offence.

The Kamias are gradually emerging from the state of serfdom to that of free labour. But the improvement in their social status is very slow. This is due to their ignorance, improvidence and disinclination to fight their own battle. Whenever they have shown signs of independence, they have been subjected to most inhuman atrocities of their masters—their lands have been taken away, their houses and property confiscated, and their families shamelessly molested. The acquirement of servile dispositions after generations of toil and labour by the Kamia population has developed a character which cannot be modified by a stroke of pen. Legislation, therefore, cannot be immediately a cure but only act as a palliative. The real cure lies in the improvement of the lot of these wretched classes, the diffusion of elementary education, and above all the creation of a strong public opinion by patient toil in the right direction.

Viewed in a correct perspective, the problem of agrestic serfdom in India is essentially one of justice and humanity. It requires a complete readjustment of social conditions of the depressed orders of humanity who suffer from numerous disabilities, injustices and cruelties on account of their birth. This state of affairs cannot be defended on grounds of equity or true religion. Indians who are striving for national freedom ought not to deny just treatment to a section of their own countrymen. They must remember that in the struggle for national freedom and social emancipation a country cannot efficiently work in sections.

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At present more than 50,000,000 of the total population of this country belong to the so-called exterior castes and depressed orders. There can be no denying the fact that most, almost all, of these classes labour under disabilities only on account of the stigma attached to their castes. These down-trodden people have developed a deleterious inferiority complex on account of the time-worn custom which has consigned them to their present degraded condition. They have to rest content with whatever little opportunities are allowed them to develop their full stature. Under the circumstances, pinned as they are under the weight of heavy chains of prejudice and usage of long times, their existence acts as a drag on the body politic.

The salvation of India as a whole must be preceded by the solution of this grave problem which has of late attracted the attention both of the politician and the reformer. Everywhere, throughout the world, attempts are being made to ameliorate the plight of the poor. The humanitarian efforts of Mahatma Gandhi and the Christian missionary institutions in India in the cause of Harijans have been noteworthy. Whatever motives may be attributed to the uplift of the depressed, one fact stands out prominent, namely, that the present national awakening in India is entirely due to the realization of the spirit of freedom among the lower strata of humanity. It would perhaps be not far wrong to say that those who make the allegation that the movement for the uplift of the depressed classes is due to the political motives (e.g. with Mahatma Gandhi), or religious motives (e.g. with the Christian Missionaries) are themselves the victim of such motives in making this assertion. Whatever may be said, it is the bounden duty of every true Indian to do everything in his or her power to wipe out the stain of untouchability from the country, eschewing every idea of exploiting the miserable plight of these unfortunate human beings for communal or political ends.

*A Housing Policy for Rural India:* It is clear that the sanitary and housing conditions of the Agricultural workers in India are deplorable, and that their improvement is an urgent duty incumbent on the Government. The farm servants are provided accommodation in the employer's own house, or in adjoining houses, but the landless field workers are without a house of their own, and the agrestic serfs are almost always found to sleep in stables, cattle-sheds and out-houses. In many European countries poor housing conditions were one of the principal causes of the rural exodus and shortage of agricultural workers. But comprehensive measures have now been adopted concerning the accommodation of agricultural-workers. This may, to a large extent, be due to the commercialized nature of agriculture, extensive farms, permanent employment of labour, use of machinery, new processes of agriculture and the development

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of vocational training, where the conditions of agricultural labourers tend to approach the conditions of industrial workers. But conditions in India are quite different, and therefore, the problem of Rural Housing deserves special attention. In India all classes of agricultural workers have their own houses, as housing accommodation is given to the agricultural serfs; the farm is far removed from the villages of the workers and therefore, it is difficult to exercise control on the housing of workers. The employment of field workers is of a very temporary nature, and therefore, the employers have no interest in the housing of their employees; agricultural workers are generally poor and unenterprising; while many social customs and geographical conditions stand in the way of Housing Reform.

Therefore protective measure regulating the living-in conditions of agricultural workers in India should be confined to very general terms, and should take into consideration the following proposals:—

(a) Prohibit the lodging of agricultural workers, whether voluntary or supplied by employers, in stables or out-houses, the degree and nature of the isolation that must be insisted upon being that cattle and men should not sleep together.

(b) Fix the accommodation space and the height of the houses according to the size of the family. The supervision of housing accommodation is regulated by a special Bill in Austria, which fixes that the living and sleeping rooms should allow at least 10 cu. metres of air space and 3 sq. metres of floor space. In Sweden the Public Health Act of 1919 lays down rules touching the quality of dwelling in the country side and also makes provision for Inspection, and the Collective Agreements for Agriculture provide at least 33-35 sq. metres of floor space for each family dwelling.<sup>10</sup> Considering the geographical conditions in India, it is necessary that the dwelling for an average family of  $3\frac{1}{2}$  adults should consist of two rooms of 18×12 feet each and one verandah 36×10 feet, occupying a floor area of not less than 792 sq. ft. (Exceptions, however, may be made in cases of one-man families). For the cattle, if any, a shed may be provided by the side of the house.

(c) Prescribe special measures regarding lighting and ventilation i.e., there should be at least two windows of a certain size which may be opened in such a way as to allow free sunshine and free passing of the currents of air.

(d) Construct houses which may give protection against rain and fire, and may be suitable for all seasons, bearing in mind the size

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<sup>10</sup>International Labour Conference, Third Session, Report IV, Part II, pp. 44-56.

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of the family income and the proportion of income at various levels that can be devoted to housing and the cost of residential buildings.

(e) Forbid the ejection of a tenant from his residential house in the village merely because he has been ejected from his holding in the village.

(f) Entrust the District Labour Inspectors, Sanitary Inspectors, and the Panchayats, with the task of seeing that the regulation is observed. In Spain and Finland the Local Authorities and Agricultural Inspectors exercise control, while in the U.S.A. the co-operation of the Rural Police is most significant.

But no scheme of Rural Housing will be successful which does not seek the co-operation of the State and the Employers and Workers' Organizations. In Sweden organized agricultural workers have included the housing question in their programmes and in the current Collective Agreements have obtained a recognition of certain minimum demands as to the size and nature of dwellings in the case of premises directly provided by the employer as part of the consideration for which the labourer works. In India, however, in the absence of strong workers' organizations only State and Co-operative Housing Policies can be successful. Housing for the rural masses should now be regarded as a public utility, as much the same sort of responsibility as provision for adequate water supply, road building, lighting, etc., and Public Housing Policies should be evolved in the interest of public health and welfare.<sup>11</sup> But the question of improvement of dwellings in the country is not only a question of what is socially desirable but also as to what is economically possible. This will require the bridging of the economic gap between small incomes and the cost of adequate housing. The State should grant credit to Rural Co-operative Housing Societies, and, through enactment of legislation, control the construction and occupation of model houses for residency purposes only and not for sale or profit-making letting-out. In Germany Consumers' Co-operative Societies have taken up building programmes, while in the U. S. A. Co-operative Housing Societies are amalgamated with Co-operative Distribution of commodities.<sup>12</sup> A system of co-operative societies with a combined programme of Credit, Distribution, and Housing is strongly recommended for India. Co-operative Housing has made considerable progress in the case of urban workers, but the agricultural workers have almost entirely been neglected. A scheme of co-operative settlement in the canal colonies of the Punjab, the horticultural regions of the Eastern

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<sup>11</sup>Edith E. Wood: "Housing", *Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences*, Vol. VIII, p. 512.

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Gangetic Plains, and the regions where the agricultural industry is stable and the workers' population settled, would greatly improve the condition of agricultural workers in northern India. "The building of a new farm-home, as is the belief of rural folk in America, is one of the most important episodes in life, and it should be given long, careful, and prayerful study. It should be built in keeping with its surroundings and the tastes and requirements of the people."<sup>13</sup> Therefore, in evolving a Housing Policy for Rural India, we require not only a system of planned housing and zoning of settlements, but the close co-operation of the State and Workers' Organizations for the enforcement of protective and constructive measures by legislative enactment.

*Re-organization of Rural Administration:* The hierarchy of rural organization which will link up the village workers with wider social and political organizations of the country will be the *Gaon Sangathan* (Village Guild), the Village Panchayat, Tahsil and District Sabhas, the Provincial Peasant Union, and the All-India Agrarian Organization. These bodies will be entirely non-violent and work on purely democratic and constitutional lines.

The Village Guilds shall be the foundation of the whole scheme and shall tackle every kind of problem of their respective villages. Each smaller village (*Nagla*)<sup>14</sup> with a population of not less than 100 but not more than 1,000 shall have a village guild. The membership of a guild will be limited to ten members elected by votes. All persons, 21 years of age, and residing in the *Nagla* shall be entitled to vote and to be elected a member. The term of membership shall be at least three years. The main function of these village guilds shall be to look after the health, sanitation, and general welfare of the people residing in the *Nagla*. Their duties shall also include the sinking, cleaning, and repairing of wells for the supply of drinking water; maintenance of ponds and tanks for washing and bathing purposes; supervision of food-stalls, sale of ghee, milk, and sweets; disposal of the refuse and night-soil; organization of akharas (clubs) and other forms of recreation; settlement of petty disputes of domestic nature; and representation to the Panchayat of matters of greater economic and social importance.

The Village Panchayat will be the most important village organization and will be gradually given more power and resources

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(13) Waugh: "Country Planning", p. 79.

(14) A Cluster of homesteads is called 'Nagla' or 'Mazhra', and a group of Naglas makes a 'Mauza' or Village.



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with which to tackle the problems of various village guilds. The Panchayat shall consist of at least two representatives from each village guild of which not more than ten will be affiliated from an area of not more than two square miles. Their functions shall be many and varied and the whole structure of the rural administration shall be built around them.

The Tahsil Sabhas shall include representatives from the Village Panchayats in each Tahsil and their function will be more or less to give the Panchayats a social and political recognition. They shall control and supervise the work of Panchayats and exercise disciplinary power over them. They shall organize the *Kisans* and *Khet-mazdoors* into strong political parties and aim at redressing their disabilities through the support of Provincial Unions. Their work shall not be purely political, but also cultural. They shall organize fairs, exhibitions, and inter-Tahsil markets, lectures and cinema-shows, sports and games, rural libraries, night schools and various social and religious functions. The Tahsil Sabhas will be affiliated to District Sabhas, which again will form a representative provincial body.

The District Sabhas shall consolidate the various Kisan and Mazdoor Sabhas and direct their programmes. They shall control Rural Labour Exchanges and supervise the work of Rural Labour Inspectors. They shall assist Panchayats in the distribution and realization of loans to cultivators, establish cottage workshops and co-operative multi-purpose societies, revive regional and seasonal subsidiary industries for the floating field-workers, and represent the cause of Ryot Associations to the District Authorities and Provincial Unions.

The Provincial Unions shall exercise control over District Sabhas and render technical aid and expert advice. Their discretionary functions shall be the organization and control of the Provincial Rural Labour Boards and the supervision of the work of Rural Labour Commissioners, organization of unemployment and famine relief, creation of public opinion by propaganda; publication of literature; securing legislative measures and enactment of laws, making representations to the All-India Agrarian Party for the performance by them of such other functions as are beyond their power.

But in a country like India where the taxable capacity of the population is very low, the paucity of funds stands as a great impediment to any new schemes of Labour Organization. It is more

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so in the case of the agricultural population which is already overburdened with heavy taxes and has recently suffered much from the agricultural depression. Nevertheless, under the new scheme a nominal cess on all agricultural income, not exceeding two per cent., supplemented by Government contribution, will provide sufficient funds for the purpose. The Government should hand over its contribution to the Provincial Unions which will disburse it among the Districts Sabhas according to their fixed quotas. Since the Panchayats will perform the most important function, their share will be the largest. In the case of Village Guilds, they will receive not more than half of the two per cent. cess realized in their respective villages, while the balance will be made over to the Panchayats. These bodies will no doubt effect considerable economy by eliminating waste of labour and money, and by revitalizing and reorganizing the highly productive pursuits. They will raise the standard of living of the agricultural workers which is likely to result in an all-round feeling of happiness and contentment. Moreover, the satisfaction and experience which the people will attain by doing their own work will go a long way to prepare them for newer and weightier responsibilities which they may have to shoulder in the near future.

*Rehabilitation of the Goan Panchayats:* A good deal can be accomplished if the Village Panchayats are trusted and given initiative as well as power. No amount of State intervention can accomplish what may be achieved by the Village Panchayats themselves in matters of consolidation and collective economy of irrigation, employment of labour and regulation of hours and conditions of work, supply of credit and the introduction of co-operative cultivation, protection of woman and child labour in agriculture, and regulation of the common social life lived in the village. These now have to be reoriented to wider social and economic needs, and the Panchayat is the natural social lever of such reconstruction. The Panchayats will not only minimize social waste but speed up the nationalization of land, and considerably prevent the conflict between the "haves" and the "haves-not".

The Local Self-Government Committee appointed by the U.P. Government have suggested that there should be only two main divisions of Local Self-Government, viz., one for urban and the other for rural areas. It recommended that every village with a population of 1,000 or more and having sufficient income for its needs should be declared a Gaon (village) Panchayat, and that villages with population below 1,000 should be grouped together to make a Panchayat. So far as possible grouping of villages should be undertaken when lying within a radius of two miles and after

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taking into account the local conditions of those villages and their ability to raise the finances required.

Any person of 21 years of age or above, residing within the Panchayat area, should be elected a member and entitled to vote. No voter should be entitled to vote or to stand as candidate for more than one Panchayat. There should be 9 to 15 members in a Village Panchayat and the electoral roll, something like register of voters for each village, should be prepared by the *Patwari*, and revised periodically by a *Kamungo*. The assistance of a few non-officials in the preparation of the electoral roll will be appreciable. It will be opposed to democratic principles if the zamindars and money-lenders should be disqualified from standing as members of the Panchayat, although the legitimate fear of the kisans is the Zamindars who as a class have considerable power and influence in villages and dominate the Panchayat. Therefore it will be desirable that at least three-fourths of the members of a Panchayat should be tenants and field-workers. The inclusion of the village artisan, the *patwari*, and the *chowkidar* would, no doubt, facilitate the work of the Panchayat.

The functions of the Panchayat should be the regulation of inter-village markets, celebration of local festivals, establishment and maintenance of primary schools, management and care of village grazing-lands for the benefit of all the people, voluntary consolidation of holdings, marketing of agricultural produce, improvement in means of communication, construction and repair of inter-village roads, maintenance of civic guards, regulation and distribution of water-supply for irrigation purposes, extension of village sites and control of rural housing, regulation of hours and conditions of work in agriculture, establishment and maintenance of rural libraries, organization of village akharas or clubs, and other measures of public utility calculated to promote the moral and material welfare of the villagers.

The Panchayats will make recommendations to the Tahsil Sabhas which will represent them to the competent District authorities in respect of all matters of administration affecting the local area concerned, including the question of appointments, transfer, or dismissal of *Patwaris*, *Mukhyas*, and *Chowkidars*. The Gaon Panchayat should be invested with judicial power for deciding petty civil, criminal and revenue cases. The Local Self-Government Committee suggests that the Judicial Panchayats should be set up for each Gaon Panchayat and they should be elected bodies. The elected

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members of a group of Gaon Panchayats should together elect the panel of members from among themselves or from outside, and from this panel, members should be selected to constitute Judicial Panchayats. The Tahsil Committee, elected by members of the Gaon Panchayats in that Tahsil should supervise and control the work of the Panchayats in their area.<sup>15</sup>

*Special Measures for the Protection and Welfare of Agricultural Labourers:* In the interest of improvement of the social and economic condition of agricultural workers, it is urgently necessary that they should enjoy the benefit of Social Insurance. Agricultural workers should be placed on the same footing as industrial workers and should receive adequate protection against sickness and invalidity, and have provision for old age. In Denmark agricultural labourers are included under all forms of insurance, i.e. Accidents (Compulsory Insurance); State-Aid-Sick-Clubs (Voluntary); and Old Age Pensions (Grant-in-Aid). In Great Britain the National Health Insurance Acts apply both to industrial and agricultural labourers; insurance is compulsory, and the benefits are: free medical attendance and medicines; sickness, disablement and maternity benefits; provisions for old age being made by Old Age Pension Acts.<sup>16</sup> In France and Spain the laws relating to industrial accidents apply to agricultural workers also, but the conditions of employment and the small number of accidents in agricultural undertakings do not justify its inclusion in the case of India. Therefore the laws instituting systems of insurance, the object of which is to compensate persons injured during the course of employment, are less urgently required than those of sickness and old age pensions, the object of which is a general all-round improvement of the condition of agricultural labourers. The urgency of a Social Insurance Legislation is greatly felt in India on account of the very large number of the agricultural proletariat. The scope of such reform should be extended to those tenant-cultivators and peasant-proprietors also whose economic status is analogous to that of agricultural wage-earners. A system of compulsory insurance for permanent workers on a contributory basis is recommended. The cost should be borne by the State.

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(15) *Proposals of the Local Self-Government Committee, U.P., The 'Leader', August 2, 1938.* The Government of the U.P. have incorporated comprehensive measures for the rehabilitation of Rural Administration in the *Gaon Hukumat Bill* of June, 1947.

(16) I. L. C. op. cit., Report IV, Part 4, p. 100; and "Social Security Scheme", Sir William Beveridge, London, 1943.

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Another measure urgently required to ameliorate the condition of agricultural workers would be the organization of vocational and technical education. Vocational agricultural education is necessary not only in the interest of the agricultural worker but in that of the entire nation, because such education will have a special importance in securing better conditions of livelihood to agricultural workers of all classes, preventing unemployment, increasing production, checking the rural exodus, and helping the landless proletariat to become an independent cultivator. Some measures towards ruralizing schools, imparting basic education, and introducing special technical courses for agricultural workers have been initiated by various Congress Governments in India. At present there is the need of general mass education and technical agricultural education—the former to produce better citizens, and the latter to improve the earning capacity of rural workers. It is particularly desirable that all elementary instruction in rural districts should be directed to the formation of an agrarian consciousness in the children, who would then, when they grew up, infallibly seek that technical agricultural instruction to which at present the masses of the rural population do not attach sufficient importance even where the greatest facilities are offered them. This can be done by opening Agricultural Apprenticeship Centres, Rural Continuation Schools, Night Clubs, and Summer Camps for rural children. Great importance should also be attached to the organization of schools of Domestic Science and Household Management for village girls.

Agricultural workers should be guaranteed the right of association and combination in the same manner as is granted to industrial workers. The rights already won by agricultural workers in this respect in the Western countries during the course of the last five decades are noteworthy. In Sweden, the National Collective Agreement of 1919 formally recognizes the rights of association of agricultural workers. Articles 56 of the Federal Constitution of Switzerland, and section 10 of the Finland Constitution Act of 17th July, 1919, guarantee complete freedom of association and combination both economically and politically to agricultural workers of all classes. The Trade Union Act of 1871 (repealed in 1917) of Great Britain guaranteed combination for the better and more equitable regulation of the conditions of employment and for the purpose of mutual support, both of the industrial and agricultural labourers. But the Government of India, though not opposed to the principle, have actually done nothing to assist or encourage the formation of Agricultural Workers' Unions and Organizations, with the result that they are less qualified than their industrial confreres

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to defend their rights. When so many countries have taken this lead, why should India hesitate to bind itself on questions of socio-political reform?

There is also the need for developing the amenities of rural life. We should not only introduce agencies for the promotion of organized recreation, but try to bring order and beauty into rural life. The countryside must be made beautiful and attractive both by the preservation of natural beauty and the development of rural architecture. The disparity between the town and the country can be reduced by providing the rural masses with facilities for aesthetic and cultural development. In India, the dire economic struggle, through which practically all rural people have to pass, has developed a philosophy of life which considers remunerative work alone as righteous. This "work-attitude" has considerably slowed up the introduction of organized recreation into rural life, and has caused rural exodus and rural degeneration. The monotony and distraction of rural life can be broken by a systematic promotion of social welfare and economic prosperity of the agricultural population by the organization of Village *Akharas* (physical culture institutes), Community Field Days and Festivals, Dramatic Societies (*Natak Mandalis*), and Village *Bagichis* (Clubs), and also by holding inter-village competitions in wrestling, music and sports. This should be supplemented with occasional talks from eminent villagers and town-folk on matters concerning rural life and labour. There should also be well-equipped rural libraries; and night schools run by philanthropic individuals or private institutions should receive Government aid and encouragement. These facilities will enable the country-folk to participate in the amenities of urban life. This will require not only the planning of practical programmes but also the co-ordination of agencies of propaganda and social control, such as the Panchayats, Village Social Welfare Leagues, Kisan Sabhas, Praja Mandals, the Radio, and the Rural Stage.

Finally, there is the all important need for establishing Social Clinics and launching a programme of National Self-Direction. Social Control, whether in the form of taboo, custom or law, or by an enlightened public opinion, is necessary to regulate the conduct of members in society. But in order to make control effective the symptoms of each social evil have to be studied by experts. Each nation, therefore, should make it a point to establish Social Clinics to facilitate experiment and research in social problems, and employ the services of technicians in the solution of these problems, otherwise it will be difficult to follow successfully the programme of National

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**Self-Direction.** Population Control is the first and most pressing of all social questions in India. The growing disparity between food and mouths, and the consequent lowering down of the general standard of living, most urgently demand social reform. At the Population and Family Hygiene Conference, Sir Jehangir Coyajee said that, "those who agreed that India was not over-populated found it very difficult to explain the low standard of living, the poor purchasing power of the agriculturist, and the increasing incubus of fragmentation of holdings."<sup>17</sup> Dr. Radhakamal Mukerjee also supports the contention that, "we are very far from the optimum of population."<sup>18</sup> Thus it may be said that the position of the agriculturists in India could never be ameliorated by pseudo-economic measures which could end only the vicious circle, but could be improved only by teaching them how to limit the size of their families. Owing to lack of knowledge of birth-control, or self-control, or due to ill-occupied leisure, many classes of agricultural workers, specially those on the lowest rung of the social ladder, are breeding like rabbits and rats, ultimately increasing the nation's social liabilities. There is, therefore, not only the need for an effective control of marriages but also of the inculcation of eugenic ideas upon the people in order to maintain a relative proportion between the well-born and the ill-born.<sup>19</sup> In population India does not require numbers so much as quality. In order to improve the physical and intellectual standards of the country, eugenics should become an orthodox religious tenet of our future life. But allied to the question of population control are the problems of child welfare and nutrition. Rural children are neglected not only in the pre-school period but perhaps even more seriously during the school period. The dire poverty of the masses compels them to subsist on an ill-balanced and inadequate diet which undermines, in the critical period of growth, the health and efficiency of the growing generation.<sup>20</sup> The problem of rational

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(17) Presidential Address, Population and Family Hygiene Conference, Bombay, April 10, 1938.

(18) *The Political Economy of Population*, 1940, p. 14.

(19) Gandhi, M. K., *Self-Restraint versus Self-Indulgence*; the British Committee on the Ethics of Birth Control; and the "Balance of Births and Deaths", by Kuczynski, Vol. I, pp. 40-43.

(20) Diet Surveys of Aykroyd and Krishnan of the Nutrition Research Laboratories at Coonoor, 1936, "Indian Journal of Medical Research" Vol. XXIV, 1936-37, pp. 171-172, 419 *et. seq.* and 667 *et. seq.* Also "Problem of Nutrition in India", Indian Journal of Social Work, December, 1941.

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dietetics and nutrition should at once draw the attention of our economists and sociologists so that some reliable data may be available for constructing our future programme.<sup>21</sup> The establishment of Social Clinics will not only provide better opportunities for aspiring members to cultivate their habits and discipline their conduct under proper auspices and healthy social environment, but will guide the guardians of the Social Mind and facilitate the progress of National Self-Direction.<sup>22</sup>

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- (21) For comparative figures of mortality rates for certain Deficiency Diseases, refer to Public Health Commissioner's Report for 1936, pp. 71-78. Also, Ganguli, "Health and Nutrition in India", 1938, pp. 280-84; and "The Health of India", by J. B. Grant, Oxford Pamphlets on Indian Affairs, No. 12, April, 1943.
- (22) Rene Sand, "Health and Human Progress", 1935, pp. 40-44; Mixed Committee of the League of Nations, "Final Report on the Relation of Nutrition to Health, Agriculture, and Economic Policy, Geneva, 1937, pp. 80-82; and "The Respective Spheres of Public Authorities and Voluntary Organization in the Administration of Social Services, Journal of Public Administration, 1927, pp. 390-397.









